

Mount Desert Island Historical Society
Collections Policy October 8, 2014

This document updates and revises the previous Collections Policy adopted by the Board in September 2011. It reflects changes in the Mission, Vision, and Strategic Plan of the Historical Society as well as shifting emphasis in the museum world from object-centered exhibits to those that emphasize the visitor learning experience.

I. Background

The Mount Desert Island Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1931. The Society is staffed by an Executive Director, Administrative/Creative Assistant, and a seasonal museum docent, along with volunteers from the Board and community-at-large. The Board of Directors is responsible for the care, preservation, and documentation of the Society's collection, which is owned by the Society and held in trust for the public.

II. Mission and Vision

The mission of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society is to keep, discover, and celebrate the history of Mount Desert Island. Its vision is to keep history at the Sound School House Research and Education Center, invite visitors to discover history at the Somesville Museum and Gardens, and celebrate history through adventurous and collaborative outreach activities.

III. Strategic Plan

The Society keeps history when it creates the Sound School House Research and Education Center; collects artifacts of island history and protects them from fire and other damage; holds educational events; promotes island history via the internet; serves as a research center for scholars; and establishes formal alliances with the University of Maine, College of the Atlantic, and Mount Desert Island schools.

The Society invites visitors to discover history, especially in Somesville, where the campus features the Thaddeus Shepley Somes Memorial Bridge, the Heirloom and Louisa Conrad Gardens, the 1780 Selectmen's Building and the Somesville Museum. In Somesville it preserves and protects the grounds and facilities through a program of maintenance, renovations, and upgrades; interprets island history in revealing and engaging exhibits and in the Heirloom and Louisa Conrad Gardens; and serves as a gateway to the surrounding community, including the village's historic buildings and beautiful setting.

The Society celebrates history and builds community through adventurous and collaborative outreach activities. The plan is to:

- A. Designate one big adventure each summer to create excitement about history and capture the community's imagination;
- B. Forge new and strengthen old ties with different segments and organizations in the community, with a particular focus on children and young adults;
- C. Examine the feasibility of funding, endowing, building, and operating the *Abraham Somes*, a replica Chebacco boat, to serve as the Society's flagship.

IV. Authority

There is a Collections Committee composed of two Board members, the Executive Director, and one or more at-large-members of the Society.

This committee has the authority to accept objects¹ for the collection, and consults with the Board of Directors when considering acquiring objects not included in the acquisitions plan. The committee also recommends to the Board selected objects for de-accession and their means of disposal, and meets periodically, as necessary.

V. Scope

A. The Society aims to collect and keep objects to further its mission, vision, and strategic plan. These may be of current or future historical value; historical, not monetary, value determines relevancy. The primary collection includes objects for use by researchers; a secondary collection is for use in exhibits or for educational purposes.

B. The current collection includes

1. Archival material (5,684 letters, papers, manuscripts, newspaper articles, pamphlets, maps and nautical charts, architectural drawings, oral histories, ephemeral material);
2. Photographs (5,930 prints, slides, negatives, cabinet cards, ambrotypes, daguerreotypes, albums);
3. Books (840);
4. Objects (1,397 chairs, tables, textiles, cradles, musical instruments, nautical objects, clock, signs, paintings, tools, and other man-made objects).

C. The scope of the collection includes

1. 1997 Paul Stubing Ballard Print Collection
2. Charles Butt, Ballard Negative Collection
3. W.H. Ballard "Y" (Yachting) Negatives
4. Anne and Ted Welles Collection (Ballard Negatives and Prints)
5. Alfred Vigue Collection (CCC negatives)
6. Eugene Merchant Collection (Items from Merchant Home, esp. WWII)
7. Fernald Photo Collection
8. Audio-Visual History Collection
9. Fred L. Savage Collection (Architectural Drawings and papers)
10. Robert W. Patterson Collection (Architectural Drawings and papers)
11. LaRue Spiker (1912-1995) Collection (papers, photographs)
12. Lewis Gerrish Jr. Collection
13. Map Collections (maps, nautical charts, atlases, including a 1776 des Barres chart of MDI and an 1855 map of the U.S.
14. Gamester Collection
15. MDI Marathon Collection
16. Oral History Collection
17. Papers, objects & photographs by and about early Mount Desert Island families, e.g., Somes, Richardson, Gilley
18. Champlain Society Logs, Journals, and Photographs

VI. Acquisitions and Accessions

Acquisitions (obtained; ownership not necessarily transferred)

¹ This word describes components of collections, especially history collections. (Simmons, p. 10)

Accessions (formally added to collection through Deed of Gift)

A. The Society is very selective about the objects it acquires and collects only those whose provenance can help interpret the history of Mount Desert Island; that is, every acquisition should have a relevant story. Acquisitions shall be approved by a simple majority of the Collections Committee. Furthermore

1. The present owner must have clear title to the object;
2. The Society can care for the object;
3. The object does not duplicate content already in the collection (except in extraordinary circumstances);
4. The object is in reasonably good condition;
5. The object has potential use for research, education, or exhibit.

B. Donations

1. No staff member or member of the Board shall offer an appraisal or an estimate of monetary value for any item to donors or prospective donors, or otherwise state or suggest a fair market value of any potential gift to the Society. It is the responsibility of the donor to provide and pay for any appraisal for any donation being considered for a tax deduction. The Society does not currently consider the collection a financial asset on its balance sheet.
2. Guidelines for donating objects will be posted on the Society's website.
3. A receipt for the object shall be entered in the Past Perfect database (temporary custody-see Appendix) and a copy given to the donor with the explanation that the Collections Committee will decide whether or not to accept the object into the collection; the donor should also be thanked by the Director. Donors shall provide as much information as possible about the object and its provenance
4. Upon acceptance into the collection, donors will receive a Deed of Gift (see Appendix), to be signed by the donor and the Executive Director, collections manager or curator. This document legally transfers ownership of the object(s) to the Society. It is preferable to accept donations without any restrictions as to reproduction, copyright, or other associated limits.
5. Acquisitions are recorded in the Accessions Book and the unique number and other documentation entered into the Past Perfect database.
6. A catalog record (or records) is/are then established in the Past Perfect database by the collections manager, curator or trained volunteer following established procedures.

C. Purchases

1. The same guidelines for acquiring donations apply to purchases for the collection.
2. A simple majority of the Collections Committee shall be required to approve all purchases.

VII. De-accession and Disposal

A. De-accessioning removes items permanently from the collection and must be used with caution, bearing in mind the public trust, and current law.

1. Objects should not be de-accessioned if they have been in the collection less than three years.
2. The process should be transparent and documented in the Past Perfect database; the records should not be deleted as they are part of the permanent record.

3. Missing objects should not be de-accessioned.

B. The Collections Committee shall advise the Board about objects it recommends for de-accession prior to any action, considering the following criteria:

1. Object does not meet collection criteria, lacks physical integrity, endangers other objects, has deteriorated beyond usefulness, is a duplicate;
2. Object requires storage or conservation the Society is unable to provide;
3. Object is no longer appropriate to the Society's mission or is likely never to be used.

C. Undeeded objects

1. Objects that have not been accessioned are considered abandoned property and treated according to current Maine State Law (see Appendix).
2. Many of the objects acquired in the early years have no apparent documentation or known provenance; they are "undeeded." Most of the later donations or purchases have been carefully documented and ownership to the Society legally transferred by a Deed of Gift.

D. Methods of disposal

1. Transfer to an Educational Collection.
2. Exchange with or give to another non-profit institution.
3. Sell at public auction or by a disinterested third party, but no direct sale or transfer of any objects de-accessioned by the Society may be made to anyone associated with the Society, including members, staff, directors, volunteers, consultants or members of their immediate families. Proceeds from any sale shall be used solely for acquisitions or expenses related to the collection, not for general operations.
4. Destroy

Note:

Accession numbers shall be removed from the objects prior to disposal;
Objects shall not be returned to their previous owners; they have been legally transferred to the Society and held in trust for the public.

VIII Loans

A. Incoming

1. The Society borrows objects for exhibition, educational purposes or study in accordance with its Mission.
2. The same care and security given its own collection apply to borrowed objects. They should be exhibited in a safe area and kept free from dust, dirt, and human and environmental damage. Loans should be accepted only for a specified time period.
3. A loan agreement form (see Appendix) signed by both a representative of the lending party and a Society representative shall be kept on file and again signed by both parties when the object is returned..
4. Loss or damage in transit or on the Society's premises should be reported immediately to the lender.
5. A detailed condition report should accompany the loan (see Appendix).
6. The Society will insure borrowed objects under its policy for the amount specified by the lender; if no amount is specified, the Society will insure them at its own estimated

valuation.

B. Outgoing

1. Objects from the Society's collections may be loaned to qualified institutions or individuals on a case-by-case basis; records of such loans shall be entered into the Past Perfect database and return-date entered when that occurs.
2. Loans must be approved by the Executive Director, curator, or collections manager.
3. Loans are for a specified period of time. A loan agreement form that includes the condition of the lending object and any restrictions or rights to reproduction shall be signed by both parties when the object is taken from the collection and when it is returned.
4. It is preferred that copies of archival papers not originals be loaned. Original archival papers are only loaned in special circumstances.
5. Borrowers shall handle objects with proper care and provide adequate security to protect them against vandalism, theft, insects, vermin, mold and other pollutants.
6. Borrowers may not loan to third parties without permission of the Society.
7. Credit to the Society must be displayed with the items.
8. Preference is given to loans to local organizations, although exceptions may be made with the approval of the Executive Director, curator or collections manager.

C. Long-term loans, loans “on deposit,” or permanent loans shall not be accepted; the Society is not a storage facility for other organizations or individuals.

D. The Society does not accept “objects in custody”: those left for identification, authentication, or examination for purchase.

IX. Collection Care

A. Climate

The collection shall be protected from excessive heat, cold, and humidity wherever its objects are located.

1. There is a climate-controlled room at the Sound School House for most of the objects; this area is also served by a fire suppression system. The temperature should be maintained between 55 and 65 degrees; the humidity between 45 and 60 percent, depending on external conditions. A designated person from the collections team shall note the conditions of the room weekly, either manually or by using a data-logger. Other rooms at the Sound School House are heated and air-conditioned.
2. The two buildings at the Somesville campus (Selectmen's Building and Museum) are neither heated nor air-conditioned and subject to high humidity in the summer. Some means of controlling this humidity, possibly a heat pump or vents in the eaves under the roof, should be installed. Use of fans, rather than open windows, is preferred, as the latter allow dust and insects to enter. These buildings have no automatic fire-alarm or sprinkler systems.

B. Light

Care should be taken not to expose objects in the collection to harmful light, both visible and UV. The

storage area at the School House is usually dark and the school room has UV filters on the windows. At a minimum, UV filters should also be installed on the windows of the Selectmen's Building and the Museum at the Somesville campus to protect objects on display there, and current lighting checked for light levels.

C. Pests

In order to protect the collection from potentially harmful pests, no pets shall be allowed in the building.

In addition, a modest integrated pest management (IPM) system shall be initiated to include

1. Monitoring for pests using sticky traps and acting on results;
2. Keeping areas where food and drink are consumed very clean;
3. Infrequently introducing live plants or flowers into the building;
4. Enclosing new acquisitions in plastic bags;
5. Treating for pests according to current best practices.

D. Security, Fire

1. To insure the security of the buildings, a lock box should be installed on the Sound School House. (One is already at the Museum; however, it is not possible to have a lock box at the Selectmen's Building because of the special key for that door.)
2. Only the Executive Director, Admin./Creative Assistant and others on a “need to know” basis shall know the combination for these boxes.
3. At some point automated fire-alarm and security systems should be considered for the Selectmen's Building and the Somesville Museum.
4. A Disaster Plan shall be written and implemented.

E. Insurance

The collections at the Somesville Campus and at the Sound School House are insured for \$200,000.00 each.

X. Access and Use

A. Reproduction of Photographs or Documents for Outside Publication, Exhibits, Personal or Commercial Use, Educational Purposes

1. A credit line referencing the Mount Desert Island Historical Society must appear directly beneath any image published, reproduced or exhibited; for video or television, such credit must appear in the section devoted to acknowledgments.
2. In some circumstances the use of Society photographs or documents may require a legally binding contract.
3. Any restrictions on use placed by the donor, the Society, or current law must be strictly adhered to, including but not limited to copyright restrictions on reproducing works of art or photographs.
4. Nothing may be superimposed over any images, and the images or parts of an image may not be altered in any way, unless expressly permitted by the Executive Director.
5. Charges for reproducing photographs or documents shall depend upon their use—personal, non-profit institutional, commercial—bearing in mind the Society's interest in working collaboratively with other organizations and encouraging use of the Society's resources. At a minimum the Society may charge reproduction costs or ask for a donation to the Society. Charges for commercial use are negotiable with the Executive Director.

6. A copy of any publication in any form in which Society photographs or documents are used must be given free of charge to the Society.

B. Access to Collections and Collections Information

1. The Society supports research using its collections, in person, by telephone or by electronic media, subject to existing legal limitations and availability of staff or resources. The storage area is closed to the general public unless they are accompanied by staff or trained volunteer.
2. Photocopies or scans may be made if the objects will not be damaged by the process and copyright law is honored.

C. Digitization

To increase the accessibility of materials, they may be digitized and made available via the Web as funds become available and any necessary legal permission granted. They should be in an unalterable format, e.g., pdf or jpg.

XI. Resources

Catlin-Legutko, Cinnamon and Stacy Klingler, eds. The Small Museum Toolkit, Book 6: Collections and Historic Preservation. Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2012.

Simmons, John E. Things Great and Small: Collection Management Policies. Washington, D.C: American Association of Museums, 2006.

Slattery, Patrick J. and A. Bruce MacLeish. Conservation Assessment Program, Historic Preservation, Mount Desert Island Historical Society, 2006.

Tisdale, Rainey. "Do History Museums Still Need Objects?" History News, Summer 2011, pp. 19-24 and <http://aaslhcommunity.org/historynews/files2011/08/RaineySmrllLinks.pdf>.

Weil, Stephen E. Making Museums Matter. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Books, 2002.

XII. Committee

Raney Bench, Ann Benson, Tim Garrity, Betsy Hewlett, Roz Rea, Hannah Stevens, Gerry Vasisko

XIII. Appendices

1. Deed of Gift Form
2. Loan Agreement Forms (incoming, outgoing, condition report)
3. Temporary Custody Form
4. Mission, Vision, Strategic Plan
5. Abandoned Property Law (2011)