

National Trust for Historic Preservation Collections Management Policy

NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The National Trust provides leadership, education and advocacy to save America's diverse historic places and revitalize our communities.

INTRODUCTION

The National Trust. The National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States (hereafter the National Trust), chartered by an Act of Congress, October 26, 1949, is a private nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the irreplaceable. The organization and its members fight to save historic buildings and the neighborhoods they anchor. Through education and advocacy, the National Trust works to revitalize communities across the country and challenges citizens to create sustainable plans for the future.

The National Trust Collections. By Act of Congress October 26, 1949 (63 Stat. 927), the National Trust is empowered to acquire "objects significant in American history and culture, to preserve and administer them for the public benefit." The National Trust collects historic objects significant in American history and cultural property comprising fine arts, decorative arts, archival materials, archaeological materials, and architectural artifacts, all hereinafter referred to as "objects", in accordance with this policy.

National Trust Historic Site Collections Policies. National Trust Historic Sites are stewards of National Trust collections. In addition to this general collections management policy, each National Trust Historic Site that maintains National Trust-owned collections must have in place its own collections management policy, approved by the John and Neville Bryan Director of Museum Collections (hereafter the Director of Museum Collections) and the site's Board or Council, in order to ensure proper care and preservation of the collection at the site.

The National Trust Historic Site Collections Policies are intended to complement and complete the National Trust Collections Management Policy by specifying a Historic Site's internal policies regarding such issues as secondary collections, acquisition, deaccessioning, loans, and access to collections. Sites' collections management policies must be in compliance with the current National Trust collections policy.

Requirements and recommendations for sites' collections management policies are to be found in the forthcoming National Trust's Best Practices for the Care of Collections at National Trust Historic Sites.

Review and Revision. This policy is to be reviewed by the Collections Committee every three years, and any amendments or revisions to this policy must be formally approved by the Board of Trustees.

Exceptions. Periodic, prudent exceptions to the policy may be permitted when it is in the best interest of the collections. Exceptions are granted by the designated authority on a case-by-case basis, as outlined below, and should never be interpreted as a permanent amendment to this policy.

DEFINITION OF COLLECTIONS

Definition of Collections. The National Trust collections include museum, non-museum, secondary, archaeological, architectural, and archival objects, according to the guidelines below. In addition, each National Trust Historic Site with National Trust collections is to determine its own scope of collections, as it pertains to that site, in its own collections management policy.

Museum Collection. The museum collection includes, but is not limited to, fine arts, decorative arts, and historical artifacts, which are accessioned into the permanent collection, and shall receive the highest level of care. These objects are directly related to the National Trust Historic Sites.

Non-Museum Collection. The non-museum collection includes, but is not limited to, educational, research or utilitarian objects, which are not accessioned into the permanent collection. These collections are not directly related to the National Trust Historic Sites. The National Trust is no longer placing objects into the Non-Museum Collection.

Archaeological Collection. Objects including, but not limited to, field, environmental and dating samples, and all related records and documentation. The management and care of archaeological collections will be addressed in a separate collections policy.

Secondary Collections. National Trust Historic Sites are empowered to create a secondary collection, as described and outlined in the site's collections management policy. Examples of secondary collections include, but are not limited to, educational collections, research collections, reproduction collections, or study collections. Inventory, record-keeping, storage, care, and disposal of these objects are the responsibility of the sites that acquire and use them, with the oversight of the Director of Museum Collections. However, the National Trust strongly recommends that objects that may be suitable for the Museum Collection not be added to secondary collections, particularly collections intended for use.

Architectural Elements. Architectural elements of primary significance to National Trust Historic Sites or properties that have been removed from building structures either permanently or for the foreseeable future.

Archival Collection. Unless desirable for display or interpretation of a National Trust property, or unless otherwise needed by the Trust, manuscripts, documents and books acquired with a property shall be placed in an appropriate and responsible repository accessible to the public. However, if a National Trust Historic Site chooses to include archival materials in its scope of collections as defined in its collections management policy, the inventory, record-keeping,

storage, care, and disposal of these objects are the responsibility of the sites that acquire and use them, with the oversight of the Director of Museum Collections. The National Trust will retain ownership of archival collections in sites where they are already a part of the collection.

Gifts to the National Trust. From time to time, the National Trust receives gifts of objects that are unrelated to any of the above categories or to any National Trust Historic Site. In these cases, the gift is to be accepted, tracked, and managed by the appropriate receiving office, and is not to be added to the National Trust collections.

AUTHORITY/STAFFING

Statement of Authority. The Board of Trustees of the National Trust is ultimately responsible for the stewardship of National Trust Historic Sites and collections. The Board delegates authority and oversight of the historic sites and collections to the Historic Sites Committee of the Board, who in turn empowers the Vice President of Historic Sites to manage the operation and development of the Historic Sites Department. Routine oversight of the entire National Trust collection is delegated to the Director of Museum Collections, and supervision over collections at a specific site is delegated to that site's staff member with authority over the collections, hereafter referred to as the "Collections Manager".

Collections Committee. The Collections Committee is a standing committee appointed by the Vice President of Historic Sites. It is composed of a minimum of five members: the Director of Museum Collections, two staff members from the sites, one Historic Sites Department staff member, and the Vice President of Historic Sites. The Vice President of Historic Sites may choose to add additional members, standing or ad hoc, when necessary.

The Collections Committee has the authority to approve deaccessioning and the authority to approve acquisitions. Similarly, the Collections Committee must approve expenditures of funds from the sale of deaccessioned objects, although in some cases it may delegate this authority to the Director of Museum Collections. The Collections Committee has the mandate to review this policy every three years. In addition, the Collection Committee may be called upon to advise on other collections issues at the discretion of the Vice President of Historic Sites, or to recommend deaccessioning to the Historic Sites Committee.

Collections Management at the Sites. Collections management responsibility at the sites is to be addressed in each site's collections management policy. While the Collections Manager at each site does not report to the Director of Museum Collections, decisions that affect the site's collection must be made in conjunction with the Director of Museum Collections.

Lease of Collections to Costewardship Sites. In cases where the collection is leased, along with the site, to a costewardship organization, the costewardship agreement will be the presiding document. However, it should be recognized that the National Trust retains ownership of the collections, and as such, is ultimately responsible for their care and

preservation. Therefore, the National Trust must retain a complete inventory of leased collections.

DOCUMENTATION

Definition. Documentation comprises all legal, curatorial and managerial records associated with collections objects in temporary or permanent care of the National Trust. Documentation is an ongoing process that exists in a variety of formats including electronic databases and paper files.

General. The National Trust recognizes that proper recordkeeping plays a crucial role in its mission to preserve and administer objects for the public benefit. The value of documentation is based on the quality, integrity, comprehensiveness and usability of the records. The Trust recognizes that proper recordkeeping improves access to the collections, facilitates good management of the collections, and enhances the informational integrity of the collections.

National Trust Headquarters. The Director of Museum Collections is responsible for maintaining all original managerial and legal documentation concerning the collections. Headquarters may keep records on collections owned by costewardship organizations as a precautionary measure since the direct care of these collections could potentially revert to the Trust.

Sites. The Collections Manager is responsible for recordkeeping at the sites. The Collections Manager will maintain copies of all legal documents pertaining to the collections including receipts, deeds of gift and loan agreements. The Collections Manager will also maintain all curatorial records including those that document provenance and interpretive use.

Collections Database Records. The Director of Museum Collections is responsible for the development, maintenance, preservation, retention and upgrade of database collection records. The Collections Manager at each site is responsible for entering, updating and validating curatorial information about objects.

Email. Staff at both the National Trust and Historic Sites should maintain printed copies of all email correspondence pertaining to the collections in the files.

Memorial Markers. Permanent, visible memorial markers shall not be affixed to objects; however, such memorial items may be made by written testament in the object records of the Trust.

Access. All collections records are public documents and will be made available to the public upon written request and at the convenience of the site's staff. Information deemed to be confidential, e.g. value or donor contact information, is not to be shared with the general public.

ACQUISITIONS AND ACCESSIONING

Definition. To *acquire* an object is to gain legal title to it. To *accession* an object is to formally accept and record it into the National Trust collections.

Purpose. The Trust collects artifacts to enrich site interpretation and to preserve objects for the public benefit.

Authority. The decision to acquire an object is a permanent commitment of the limited resources of both the National Trust and the Historic Site that cares for it. The potential burden of an object on National Trust and site resources is directly proportional to the level of authority needed to accept the object.

Gifts. At the site, the decision-making process for the approval of acquisitions and accessions by gift is to be determined and outlined in the site's collections management policy. However, the Site Director must approve all acquisition and accessioning recommendations. Once the Site Director has given the approval, the acquisition and accessioning recommendation must be approved by the Director of Museum Collections. The Director of Museum Collections will determine on a case by case basis whether the approval of the Vice President of Historic Sites is needed to acquire an object. If the acquisition or care of an object may place an unusual burden on the site or the National Trust, the Vice President of Historic Sites may decide to seek the approval of the Collections Committee.

Purchases. As with acquisitions by gift, at the site the decision-making process for the approval of acquisitions and accessions by purchase is to be determined and outlined in the site's collections management policy. The Site Director must seek advance approval from the Director of Museum Collections when funds from the deaccessioning of National Trust collections are to be used for the purchase. Advance approval is not required if alternate funding exists and the object to be purchased falls within the stated Scope of Collections in the site's collections management policy.

In all applicable cases, the site must follow National Trust procurement procedures and guidelines.

Purchased objects are not fully accepted into the museum collection until the Director of Museum Collections, or the appropriate authority as specified above, has approved the accession.

Methods. Objects will be added to the collections by gift, bequest, transfer, exchange, field work acquisition, or other means where title is passed directly to the National Trust. An object may be purchased for the collections if no comparable object may be obtained by gift, bequest, or exchange. Purchases must be made using procurement policies of the National Trust where applicable.

Criteria. The National Trust maintains accessioned and unaccessioned objects in the collection. The decision to place an acquired object in one of these categories is dependent on various issues such as the condition of the object and its primary or secondary significance to a National Trust Historic Site.

Objects accepted into the museum and non-museum collections should be unencumbered by donor restrictions, title and copyright issues and should be accompanied by satisfactory provenance. No objects will be accessioned for a site without strong conviction that the object is best suited to that site, will receive proper care and will be useful to the site's interpretation for the foreseeable future. Restricted gifts are prohibited under normal circumstances; exceptions must be approved by the Vice President of Historic Sites. Historic Sites may not accession objects accepted for resale.

Criteria for accepting museum (accessioned) objects:

Accessioned objects must be of primary significance to a National Trust Historic Site's interpretation or previous inhabitants.

Criteria for accepting non-museum (unaccessioned) objects:

No new objects will be added to the Non-Museum collection.

Criteria for accepting architectural elements:

Architectural elements that are significant to the National Trust Historic Site that have been removed from that site for the foreseeable future may be accessioned into the museum collection. Significance will be determined by the site in conjunction with the Graham Gund Architect and the Director of Museum Collections.

Records. Records on the acquisition and accession processes and object provenance should be thorough and timely to ensure that original information is retained. The Director of Museum Collections is responsible for ensuring that accession and acquisition records are complete and well-maintained.

Appraisals. Trust staff will not provide appraisals to donors or any other parties for tax or other purposes. If an appraisal is requested, the staff will make every effort to provide the donor with a list of several reputable appraisers in their area without giving preference to any one appraiser.

DEACCESSIONING/DISPOSAL

Definition. To *deaccession* an object is to formally and permanently remove it from the collections. To *dispose* of an object is to relinquish title and remove the object from the premises.

Deaccessioning at the National Trust. Deaccessioning of any object from the National Trust collection is not to be undertaken lightly. Although at times it may be more prudent to deaccession or dispose of items in the collection than to continue caring for them, it should be understood that the National Trust does not support deaccessioning as a means of generating revenue or to simply liberate space. A careful, thoughtful, and necessarily slow process is

required to determine whether deaccessioning and disposition of an object is the best course of action for the Trust, the Site, the remaining collections, and the public.

Criteria. An object will be considered for deaccessioning if it is found to be damaged or destroyed beyond its inherent or monetary value, is determined to be unrelated to the scope of collecting for that site, does not support the mission or interpretation of the site and will not in the foreseeable future, or has been irreversibly altered beyond interpretative use. An object may also be considered for deaccessioning if it has been missing for a considerable amount of time, or is known to have been stolen, and if all efforts to retrieve or locate the object have been unsuccessful.

Architectural elements that are to be reattached or reinstalled must be deaccessioned prior to reinstallation.

Title research must be completed by the National Trust Legal Department, in order to ensure that the National Trust holds clear title to the object and is therefore free to deaccession it.

If an object is to be deaccessioned within two years of its being donated to the National Trust, the donor must be notified, as there may be tax consequences. Where appropriate, a good faith effort should be made to notify donors of an approved deaccession and pending disposal.

Authority. The Site Director has the authority to recommend deaccessioning to the Director of Museum Collections for approval. Once approved, the Director of Museum Collections will forward the request to the Vice President of Historic Sites. If the Vice President of Historic Sites approves the request, it will be forwarded to the Collections Committee. Deaccessioning must be approved by the Collections Committee, and in cases where the object has high monetary value or historical significance, the Collections Committee may decide to seek the approval of the Historic Sites Committee. In turn, the Historic Sites Committee may decide to seek the approval of the full Board of Trustees.

Non-Museum Collection. Objects in the non-museum collection are not part of the accessioned museum collection, and as such, they do not need to go through the formal deaccessioning procedure. However, due to variations in the accession, and deaccession, process in the past, disposal of objects from the non-museum collection must be cleared with the site's Board or Council and the Director of Museum Collections to ensure that the Trust holds clear title to the objects in question and is therefore free to dispose of them.

Secondary Collections. Objects in secondary collections, including archival materials, at National Trust Historic Sites may be deaccessioned with the approval of the Director of Museum Collections. Although the Director of Museum Collections has the authority to authorize deaccessioning of objects in secondary collections, the Director may also recommend that deaccessioning proceed in the same manner as Museum Collections.

Architectural Elements. Architectural elements that are to be reinstalled or reattached may be deaccessioned with only the approval of the Director of Museum Collections, the Graham Gund Architect, and the Vice President of Historic Sites. However, architectural elements proposed for deaccessioning so

