

Know Your Collections: Collections Management

DHPSNY Webinar

February 15, 2017

Dyani Feige, Director of Preservation Services,
Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts

What exactly is collections management?

“The activities that relate to the administration of collections, including planning, development, care, conservation, and documentation; caring for collections and making them available for use.”

- John Simmons, *Things Great and Small*

“The establishment of institutional policies addressing the needs of collections by providing a safe, secure, and environmentally stable space for library and archival collections; assuring that materials in diverse formats are properly housed and shelved; training staff and patrons to handle, use, and store materials with care and sensitivity; supervising the maintenance and retrieval of materials; and monitoring any activity or event that may place the collection at risk.”

- Duane A. Watson, *Preservation: Issues and Planning*

“The systematic, planned, documented process of building, maintaining, and preserving collections. Specifically ... (1) collection planning; (2) effective selection; (3) evaluation or analysis of the collections; and (4) resource sharing and coordinated collection development.”

- Jutta Reed-Scott, “Collection Management Strategies for Archivists,” *American Archivist*

Collections Management Policy

A detailed statement of why an institution is in operation and how it goes about its business.

Purposes:

- ❖ Articulate professional standards
- ❖ Serve as a guide for staff
- ❖ Describe the relationship among the organization and its collections, its authorities and staff, and the outside world



Collections Management Policy Contents

- ❖ Institutional Mission Statement
- ❖ Purpose, Scope, and Use of the Collections
- ❖ Acquisitions
- ❖ Accessions
- ❖ Deaccessions and Disposal
- ❖ Loans
 - Incoming Loans
 - Outgoing Loans
- ❖ Documentation
- ❖ Collections Care
- ❖ Insurance and Risk Management
- ❖ Access and Use
- ❖ Intellectual Property

Collections Development Policy

- ❖ Conceptual framework and collecting philosophy
 - How collections support the institutional mission, interpretation, exhibitions, and programming
- ❖ Strengths
 - Core areas that you will continue to collect
- ❖ Gaps
 - Mission-driven areas that are underrepresented
- ❖ Limits and Overlaps
 - What won't be collected
- ❖ Resources
 - Space, finances, staffing
- ❖ Formats



Collections Development Policy

Can articulate (and limit):

- Dates
- Subjects
- Regions
- Languages
- Formats / materials



Acquisition

- ❖ Gift
- ❖ Bequest
- ❖ Purchase
- ❖ Field collections
- ❖ Conversion/Found in collections
- ❖ Transfer from within the institution



Appraisal

❖ Intellectual Value

- Evidential
- Informational

❖ Intrinsic Value

❖ Ethical considerations

❖ Other considerations

- Administrative value
- Age
- Uniqueness
- Physical Consideration
- Accessibility



Accession

- ❖ Formal process used to legally accept an object and to record it as part of a collection
- ❖ Creation of a permanent record



Deed of gift


“An agreement transferring title to property without an exchange of monetary compensation.”

- *SAA Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*



Accession Number

- ❖ A unique, identifying control number to be assigned to an object, marked on the object (if possible) and used in all documentation

A 6x6 grid of wooden tiles, each containing a number. The numbers are arranged in a specific pattern across the grid.

28	4	3	31	35	10
36	18	21	24	11	1
7	23	12	17	22	30
8	13	26	19	16	29
5	20	15	14	25	32
27	33	34	6	2	9

Found-in Collections



Undocumented objects that remain without status after all attempts to reconcile them to existing records of permanent collection and loan objects are completed.

Abandoned property

<http://www2.archivists.org/groups/acquisitions-appraisal-section/abandoned-property-project>

Consolidated Laws of New York, Education Law, Part 1, Section 233-AA, Article 5

The object has been at the institution for at least 10 years.

- ❖ **Known Lenders:** Letter by certified mail, with return receipt requested to the lender's last known address, response requested within 120 days, second notice sent, 120 days later becomes property of the institution.
- ❖ **Unknown Lenders:** Publication in a newspaper of general circulation in the institution's county, after 180 days posted online with the Comptroller, 210 days later becomes property of the institution.
- ❖ **Unsolicited Property:** If items were left at the institution after 1/1/2009, they become property of the institution if no claims are made within 90 days.



Deaccessions

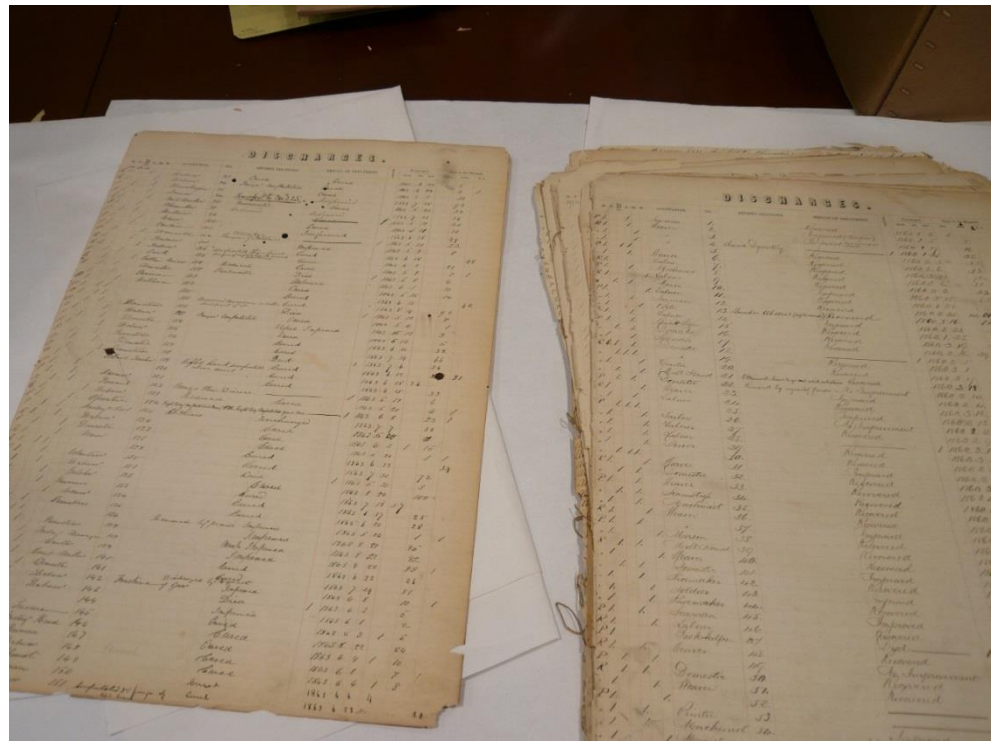
Deaccession: Permanent removal of previously accessioned materials from the institution's collections.

Disposal: Mechanisms for disposing of collections materials that have been deaccessioned and directions for the use of proceeds.



Reasons to deaccession

- ❖ Doesn't fit within collecting scope
- ❖ Unnecessary duplicates, or over-representation
- ❖ Change in collecting scope
- ❖ Unable to provide proper care and/or access
- ❖ New information regarding provenance or title
- ❖ Determined to be a fake or forgery
- ❖ Deteriorated beyond usefulness
- ❖ Object has been stolen with no recourse



Deaccession policy

- ❖ Reasons for deaccessioning
- ❖ Stipulations and restrictions
 - I.e. length of time in collection
- ❖ Responsibilities and basic procedures
 - Board or collections committee approval
 - Outline clear title
 - Remove accession numbers
 - Retention of deaccession documentation
 - Contact donor?
 - Publication of deaccession?



Deaccessions and Disposals: What actually happens?

Methods of disposing of deaccessioned collections materials:

- ❖ Educational, study or use collections
- ❖ Transfer to another institution
- ❖ Sale
- ❖ Physical destruction



Deaccessions: legal and ethical considerations

- ❖ Provisions in repository's founding documents or policies that disallow deaccessioning
- ❖ Original agreement with donor might disallow it
- ❖ Living donors
- ❖ Public relations considerations
- ❖ Who can obtain deaccessioned materials?
- ❖ Third party sales
- ❖ "Deaccessioning" undocumented objects



Proceeds from deaccessions

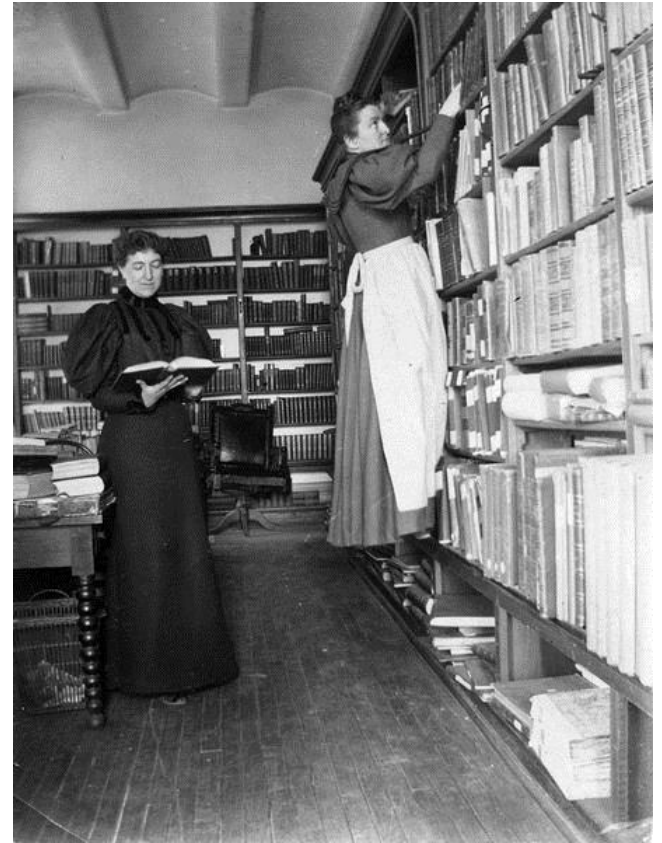
“Proceeds from the sale of nonliving collections are to be used consistent with the established standards of the museum's discipline, but in no event shall they be used for anything other than acquisition or direct care of collections.”

AAM Code of Ethics for Museums

SAA Code of Ethics does not actually address this.

Documentation

- ❖ Entry records
- ❖ Validation/ownership records (deeds of gift, bills of sale)
- ❖ Accession records
- ❖ Donor information
- ❖ Descriptive records
 - Catalog records
 - Finding aids
- ❖ Location records
- ❖ Loan records
- ❖ Use records
 - Condition
 - Exhibition
 - Conservation
- ❖ Deaccession records



Catalog, Finding Aid, Inventory

Catalog: 1. A collection of systematically arranged descriptions of materials.
2. A listing of items with descriptions.

Finding aid: 1. A tool that facilitates discovery of information within a collection of records.
2. A description of records that gives the repository physical and intellectual control over the materials and that assists users to gain access to and understand the materials.

Inventory: A list of things.



Inventory

- ❖ Transmittal inventory – An inventory of a gift or loan being transmitted to the museum
- ❖ Time-based (i.e. annual or seasonal) inventory
- ❖ Random sample or spot inventory
- ❖ Section inventory or inventory of one collection, one physical area, or one exhibit
- ❖ Complete wall-to-wall inventory

This is a bit different from a collection survey – in which you might be determining preservation needs, processing priorities, reformatting priorities, etc.



Incoming Loans

- ❖ Why materials may be borrowed
- ❖ Acceptable uses for borrowed materials
- ❖ Who may request materials to borrow
- ❖ Emergency conservation of damaged borrowed materials
- ❖ Packing, transportation and insurance
- ❖ Loan documentation
- ❖ Duration of loan



Indefinite Loans or Deposits

“Permanent loan: An oxymoron used in reference to a loan with no specified ending date.”

- John Simmons

Unsolicited deposits =
doorstep donations



Collections Committee

- ❖ Shape the collection to fit the mission
- ❖ Authorize the acceptance of donations, purchase of collections, and deaccessions
- ❖ Make sure institution adheres to the highest ethical standards
- ❖ Outreach, research, advocacy for the collection, cultivating donors
- ❖ Exhibition considerations as well as permanent collections
- ❖ Could be comprised of:
 - Collections staff
 - Board members
 - Administration (Director, etc.)
 - Outside experts (i.e. preservation professional, subject expert, representative users)



Resources

Buck, Rebecca A. and Jean Allman Gilmore, ***Collections Conundrums: Solving Collections Management Mysteries***. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2007.

Buck, Rebecca A. and Jean Allman Gilmore, ***MRM5: Museum Registration Methods, 5th Edition***. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2010.

Reibel, Daniel B., ***Registration Methods for the Small Museum***, Fourth Edition, Lanham, MD: Alta Mira Press, 2008.

Simmons, John E., ***Things Great and Small, Collections Management Policies***, Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2006.

Questions and Wrap-Up

Dyani Feige

dfeige@ccaha.org

215-545-0613

