



New York State  
Parks, Recreation and  
Historic Preservation

# STORIES FROM THE FIELD:

## DEACCESSIONING WITH NEW YORK STATE'S BUREAU OF HISTORIC SITES



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# How do we Talk About Deaccessioning?

 Artnet News

## Brauer Museum Shuttters Amid Deaccessioning Controversy

Indiana's Valparaiso University has shuttered the Brauer Museum of Art and dismissed its director, Jonathan Canning, amid ongoing controversy over the...

 The New York Times

## Selling Art to Pay the Bills Divides the Nation's Museum Directors (Published 2021)



## 1,100-year-old Buddha statue leaving University of Michigan museum for native Nepal

Officials learned that prior to its arrival in Ann Arbor, the 9th century statue may have been taken from Nepal without authorization.

 Hyperallergic

## The Toledo Museum of Art Is Deaccessioning Impressionist Works to Diversify Its Collection

The Toledo Museum of Art Is Deaccessioning Impressionist Works to Diversify Its Collection. The Ohio museum is planning to auction off three...

*An example of the effects of successful deaccessioning on other institutions: staff at the Alice Desmond Community Center were thrilled to receive three framed pieces made by Alice Desmond.*

# How do we Deaccession?

Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Regulations  
9 NYCRR Title 9, Subtitle I

Subchapter C. Collections

Part 429. Disposition of Works of Art of Historic Objects

- Acceptable criteria:
  - Object is "not relevant to the interpretive goals and policies of the office;" [irrelevant]
  - Object is "one of several examples...and other examples adequately fulfill the interpretive goals and policies of the office" [redundant]
  - Object has "deteriorated beyond usefulness or...may be hazardous" [hazardous]
- Manner of disposition:
  - Transfer
  - Sale
  - Witness destruction

# Our Deaccession Process

- Highly regulated, time intensive process
  - Involves approval by at least 16 different people
  - Requires at least four months
  - Publicly visible process
- Application for deaccession
  - Tracks object information, deaccession, and disposal
  - Includes full curatorial and conservation reports
  - Each application is numbered and maintained as record, regardless of outcome



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KATHY HOCHUL  
Governor  
RANDY SIMONS  
Commissioner Pro Tempore

## APPLICATION FOR DEACCESSION

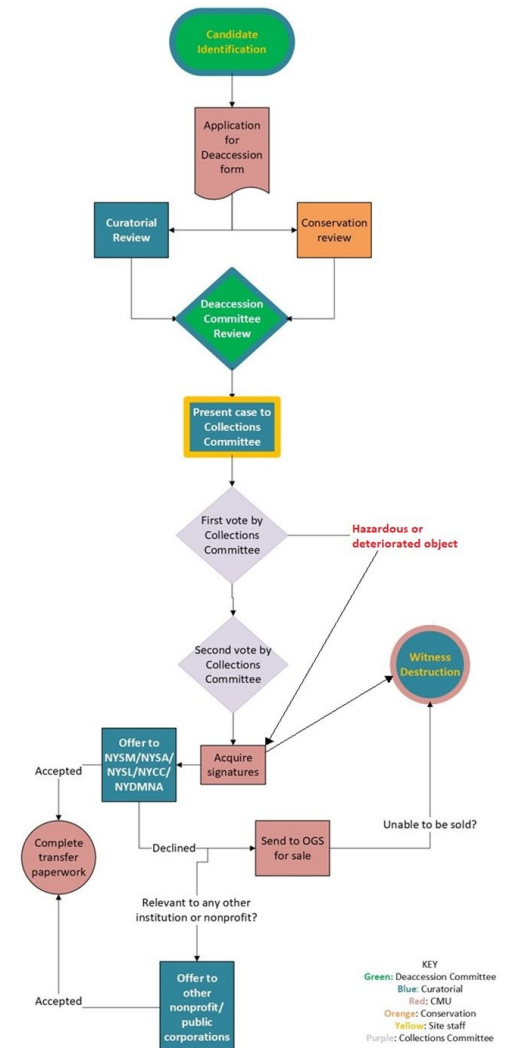
*This document is in compliance with policies and procedures approved by the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation on January 2, 1992 governing the disposal of objects from the collections of New York State Historic Sites and meets all requirements of New York State Parks Law, Section 19.29.*

DEACCESSION APP. NO.: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)  
(Assigned by Collections Management Unit)

APPLICANT(S): [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

HISTORIC SITE/PARK: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)  
(Date Submitted)



# Approaching a Large Collection

- Ensure Collections Policy is clear
- Be systematic
- Create a list of priorities
- Pay attention to size
- Ranking system



Darwin Martin  
House State  
Historic Site,  
Buffalo, New York

Washington's  
Headquarters State  
Historic Site,  
Newburgh, New  
York



# Deaccessioning FAQs

- “What if we need it one day?”
- “Don’t we have a responsibility to preserve everything that is donated?”
- “How can we deaccession something without knowing its history?”
- “Should we keep this object since it’s from a prominent local family?”
- “Can we deaccession something from our founding collection?”



# Challenges

- Logistics
- Witness destruction
- Negativity



# Goals & Potential Outcomes

- Communication
  - Inside your institution
  - Within the museum community
  - To the public
- Creativity
  - “Activate” collections through new use
  - Innovate with transfer destinations
- Cleanliness
  - Storage spaces: better care for existing collections, room for growth
  - Refine focus in exhibition spaces



# Case Study #1: Loom

- c. 1700 barn loom donated by Julius Schoonmaker, son of site's first caretaker
  - **Redundant: very similar barn loom on display at Herkimer Home**
  - **Relevance: does not fit within Senate House collections policy**
  - Condition concerns: reproduction parts, unstable
  - Storage concerns
- Site staff, Deaccession Committee, and later the Collections Committee agreed to deaccession this loom through offers to other institutions
- After all necessary paperwork and processes were complete, the loom was offered to the Schenectady County Historical Society and accepted for their collection



*Staff from Peebles Island, Senate House SHS, and Schenectady County Historical Society disassemble the loom for transfer.*

## Case study #2: Architectural Sample Collection

- 1,026 bagged architectural samples (nails, paint chips, masonry)
  - **Relevance: samples from buildings that are not interpreted by NYS; no interpretive use**
- Site staff, Deaccession Committee, and Collections Committee agreed to deaccession and dispose of this collection of samples through transfer or witness destruction
- Conservator suggested reaching out to schools with architectural conservation programs and offering this as a research collection
- The Columbia University Preservation Lab is interested in accepting this collection





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