

Town of Rock Hall

Strategic/Interpretive Planning: Collections Workshop

April 11, 2022

Topics to Discuss

Collections Care 101

- General overview
- What is a collections policy?
- How to use it

Environmental Conditions

Ownership

Accessioning & Deaccessioning

Inventorying

Moving Artifacts

Disaster Plan

Task 3: Site visit- Collections & Facilities Assessment

Site-visit to the Rock Hall's museums and storage areas to assess conditions and take general inventory of the Town's collections.

Observe the state, breadth, and management of existing collections.

Also observe facilities to review current offerings and exhibitions.

Analyze possible areas for hosting exhibitions, programming, storage, sales, and volunteers.

The purpose of the visit was to get an overall sense of 1. the amount of artifacts and images in the collections, 2. types of materials involved and 3. how they are currently being displayed and/or stored so that we can generate an appropriate collections management plan.

Task 4: Collections Management Workshop

Part of a series of facilitated workshops in which the Museum Board, Town officials and key partners determine how to restructure the museums to be a sustainable cultural resource for the region.

Focus to be the development of a professional Collections Policy and specific management recommendations to ensure more professional stewardship practices for the collections.

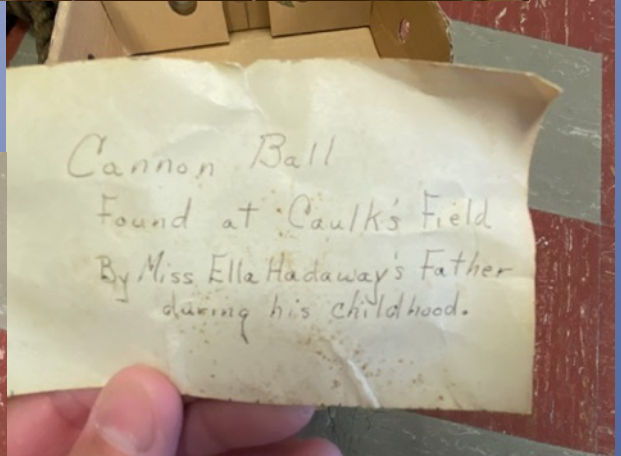
Results from the assessment and initial inventory of the Town's historic artifacts and materials will be reviewed.

Task 5: Collection Policy and Form Templates

Develop a formal Collections Policy for the management of collections utilizing the workshop discussion, assessment and report data as well as museum best practices.

Create a template for standard collections forms such as: Condition Form, Loan Form, Accession Form, Deaccession Form, etc.

Write detailed recommendations on how to best proceed with the storage of the Town's collections to ensure the appropriate stewardship of materials.







Collections Care 101

- General overview
- Why is a collections policy?
- How to use it



Collections Stewardship Standards

Stewardship is the careful, sound and responsible management of that which is entrusted to a museum's care. Possession of collections incurs legal, social and ethical obligations to provide proper physical storage, management and care for the collections and associated documentation, as well as proper intellectual control.

Collections are held in trust for the public and made accessible for the public's benefit. Effective collections stewardship ensures that the objects the museum owns, borrows, holds in its custody and/or uses are available and accessible to present and future generations.

A museum's collections are an important means of advancing its mission and serving the public.

What is a collections policy?

Because collections are held in trust for the public and are made accessible for the public's benefit, the public expects museums to maintain the highest legal, ethical and professional standards. To demonstrate these standards, museums should **create a collections management policy that outlines the scope of a museum's collection, explains how the museum cares for and makes collections available to the public, and clearly defines the roles of the parties responsible for managing the museum's collections.**



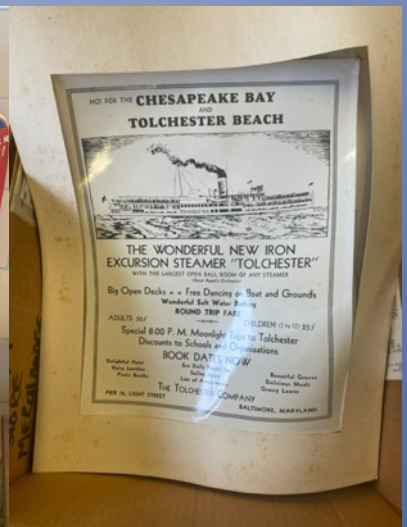
Required Elements

- Bears date approved by the governing authority
- Scope and categories of collections
- Acquisitions and accessioning (including criteria and decision-making authority)
- Deaccessioning and disposal (including criteria and decision-making authority)
- Loans, incoming and outgoing
- Collections documentation and records, including inventory
- Collections care and conservation
- Access and use of collections
- Responsibility and authority for collections-related decisions
- Collections-related ethical issues
- Statement on the use of funds from deaccessioning, limiting use to new acquisitions and/or the direct care of collections (language identical to that in the Code of Ethics)

Environmental Conditions



Ownership



A museum owns collections

- Collections are typically the central purpose of the museum, often its original reason for existing.
- A museum is defined by how it cares for and uses its collections

What is Ownership?

- The concept of ownership is a basis of Western civilization
- Foundational concept in law: “the right to possess, use or dispose of something”

Ownership in law

Ownership, a legal relation between a **person** (individual, group, corporation, or government) and an **object**.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/ownership>

Thought experiment

Every museum should suppose that the ownership of every object it possesses is contested – and imagine that you must be prepared to show evidence to prove ownership at any moment in a court of law.

Proof of ownership

What would that evidence consist of?

- **1. Title** – legally binding contract of sale or gift or transfer; copy of a Will or probate record for a bequest
- **2. Provenance** – proof that previous owners were legitimate and legal
- **3. Records of how it has been:**
 - A. cared for (condition reports, conservation reports)
 - B. stored, exhibited, lent out (inventories, exhibit labels, loan agreements)
 - C. researched, images used in education or promotion

Perils of undocumented objects

With no clear title to an item, explains Ildiko DeAngelis, director of museum studies at George Washington University, “a museum acts at its peril if it disposes of that object, or attempts to repair or conserve it, or gives permission to others to use it. In effect, such an object becomes a burden – it cannot be used effectively, yet the museum feels compelled to hold and care for the object indefinitely.”

<https://www.mnhs.org/sites/default/files/lhs/techtalk/techtalknov2004.pdf>

Abandoned cultural property

“What happens when somebody leaves an unsolicited donation at a museum? What happens when museum staff finds an undocumented object within the collection? What happens when a loaned object is never collected?

These are just a few of the problematic issues museum professionals face when dealing with historical or cultural objects. Abandoned cultural property residing in museums and other cultural institutions is a little known issue to individuals outside of the museum profession, but it negatively affects institutions of all types and sizes.

These abandoned objects drain museum resources without contributing to public use since museums do not hold clear title to the objects.”

<https://wuffencuckoo.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/12-10-2016-dma-acp-policy-brief1.pdf>

This actually happens!

- *Case in point:* Lon Keim v. Louisiana Historical Association Confederate War Museum, US Court of Appeals, 1995
- How do we prove ownership of property for the museum if previous owner does not properly log the article in as a donation?
- The previous curator received objects designated for the museum but failed to log them in as a donation. The original owner has died and the only evidence we have is an article written by the previous curator stating that these objects were going into the museum's collection. The son of the deceased now states they are his even though there was never a will. The only thing we have in writing is the article written by the previous curator.

Why standards for collections ownership?

- Avoid this kind of mess. Sloppy management => litigation or loss
- Because ownership of collections is so central to the identity and mission of a museum, the profession has developed standards to guide museums to best practices that promote consistency, clarity, transparency, and safety.
- The diversity of museums means that the standards are very broad, apply to every imaginable kind of object, including living things.

Standards for ownership of collections

1. The museum **owns, exhibits, or uses** collections that are appropriate to its mission.
2. The museum legally, ethically, and effectively **manages, documents, cares for, and uses** the collections.
3. The museum strategically plans for the use and development of its collections.
4. Guided by its mission, the museum **provides public access** to its collections while **ensuring their preservation**.

Why a Collections Policy?

- Essentially, a Collections Policy is the way to address the professional standards
- It represents a consensus by the Board of WHAT collections are appropriate to the mission; HOW the organization will acquire, care for, document, use, and dispose of collections.
- Once it is in place, it shows the community that the organization takes its responsibilities seriously... and provides consistency across different staff, volunteers, potential donors, and stakeholders.

A simple, clear statement

With our help, Old Wye Mill went through a process of thinking through and writing a Collections Policy. It has five sections:

1. Organizational Statement and Purpose
2. Authority and Responsibility
3. Scope of Collections
4. Acquiring and Accessioning Objects
5. Deaccessions

Accessioning & Deaccessioning



Acquiring and Accessioning Objects:

Old Wye Mill may acquire objects by gaining full and clear title to them through purchase, gift, bequest, or transfer from or exchange with other non-profit cultural organizations.

Key Considerations for Collection Acquisitions

- -Relevance to the Museum's mission and Scope of Collections
- -Useful for exhibition or research
- -Clear provenance and title
- -No restrictions
- -In stable, usable, exhibitable condition
- -Not a duplicate of object(s) already in the Collection
- -OWM has the resources to acquire and preserve the object.
- OWM will collect as much information about the object and its history as possible and preserve this information as part of the permanent record of the object.

Accessioning

The Collections Committee decides which of OWM's three collections the object belongs in..... When an object that has been acquired by OWM is formally entered into one of these collections, and given a number in the collection, we say that it has been accessioned. This process is reversible if the Committee votes to deaccession the object.

Deaccessions

The Collections Committee should review the Permanent Collection regularly to assess whether there are objects that no longer belong. Objects that are considered for deaccession should be carefully **documented**, should have **clear ownership** by Old Wye Mill, and should be **clearly outside the Scope of Collections**; duplicates or replicas; or in unusable condition. If the Committee votes to deaccession an object, this must be communicated to the full Board.

Disposal of Deaccessioned Objects

Deaccessioned objects should be transferred to another OWM collection or to other cultural or historical institutions, preferably within the mid-Shore region, the Eastern Shore in general, or the State of Maryland. If that is not possible, they may be sold, or in extreme cases, discarded. If an object is to be sold, it should be placed for public auction; under no circumstances may it be acquired by an employee, volunteer, or Board member of Old Wye Mill.

Moving Artifacts



Collections Moves

- Moves must always be thoughtfully and carefully considered
- Plan and prepare:
 - Have you cleared your destination space and set it up with plenty of storage?
 - Have you cleared your path to the destination?
 - Have you prepared all of your documentation and notes?

Questions to Consider about Object Safety

- Is the object in an imminent threat?
- Is it being removed for long-term storage?
- Is it stable enough to handle the move?
 - a fragile object does not benefit from unnecessary movement

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Temp ID #	OMW Record #	Brief Description	Dimensions (w/d/h in inches)	Origin (Zone #)	Destination	How to Store Suggestion (storage room if not grinding floor)	Notes
2	011	FIC. 53	Corn Sheller	30 x 12.5 x 42.4	2		pallet	
3	014		Wooden Object	?	2		pallet	
4	015 a-h	2001. 2. 1	Double Platform Scale (a) and 7 iron weights (b-h); 8 pieces total	23.5 x 9 x 9	3		grinding floor, close to door	
5	018		Gear wheel	14.5 x 14.5 x 15	3		shelving	
6	019		Gear wheel	16 x 17 x 16	3		shelving	
7	022		Fanning Mill	51 x 41 x 46.5	3		pallet	
8	030 a-h	1999. 1. 1	Hand quern [including table structure](a) and accoutrement (b-h); 8 pieces total	(a) 48 x 26 x 38.5	4		grinding floor	I believe most of the 8 pieces fit within each other so the footprint is not much larger than the quern/table itself
9	031		Prop Scoop	5 x 4 x 4.75	4		box	
10	032		Prop Scoop	5 x 4 x 4.75	4		box	

A record sheet for moving objects includes several key features:

- Catalog or Accession Number (Column A and/or B)
- Brief description of the object being moved (Column C)
- The origin or starting point (Column E)
- The Destination (Column F)

Collections Handling

Handling is item-specific, but come with some basic guidelines:

- Always wear gloves except for handling paper
- Handle the object at its strongest or beneath its widest point
 - *never use handles, they do tend to break*
- Keep it as stable as possible and use both hands
- Ask for assistance if you have any doubts





Inventorying

Inventory

“An itemized listing of the objects, often including current location, for which the museum has responsibility”

AAM Guide to Collections Planning

One of the simplest and most effective tools to keep an inventory is an excel sheet.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Temp Tag #	Floor	Zone	Dimensions (w"/d"/l")	Inventory Description	OWM #	Notes
34	---	Office Storage	-		Mill Bag	1986.1.65	
35	---	Office Storage	-		Vitacreme Buckwheat Bag	1986.1.66	
36	---	Office Storage	-		Haydon Mill & Grain Flour bag	1986.1.68	
37	001 a- g	Grinding Floor	1	42 x 31.5	Framed flour bag, shirt	1986.1.69	"Shirt (workshirt) from old mill bag"
38	126	Basement	6	5 x1.5 x11.5	Dressing Tool	1986.2.1	In display case
39	124	Basement	6	4.5 x1.5 x11	Dressing Tool	1986.2.2	In display case
40	125	Basement	6	5.25 x1.5 x12	Dressing Tool	1986.2.3	In display case
41	127	Basement	6	4.5 x1.5 x12	Dressing Tool	1986.2.4	In display case
42	128	Basement	6	6.75 x1.5 x12	Dressing Tool	1986.2.5	In display case
43	040	Office Storage		25 x 42	Framed Flour Bag, Germany	1986.12	
44	233	Basement	6	17.5 x3.5 x9	Anvil	1992.1	Is there a signed Deed of Gift- donor's name is "Ozzie Hebert"
45	199	Basement	5	96 x28 x38	Plow	1995.1	"Restricted Gift" from Jij Duffy
46	207	Basement	5	52 x28.5 x4	Scythe and wooden cradles	1996.1	Hanging on Wall, "on loan by George Faulkner"-- what is terms of restriction?
47	195	Basement	5	44 x16.5 x51	Scythe and Wooden Cradle	1996.5	Hanging on Wall
48	142 b	Grinding Floor	8		Millstone Housing	1996.01	
49	142 a	Grinding Floor	8	48"	Granite Grinding Stones by Wolf Co., Chambersburg, PA	1996.02a	Part of current grinding apparatus
50	---	Grinding Floor	8	48"	Granite Grinding Stones by Wolf Co., Chambersburg, PA	1996.02b	Part of current grinding apparatus
51	142 c	Grinding Floor	8		Hopper	1996.03	Connected to Millstone Housing (142 b)
52	238	Basement	6	30 x30 x8	Drivebelt Pulley for Midget Marvel	1996.04	
53	239	Basement	6	30 x30 x5.75	Drivebelt Pulley for Midget Marvel	1996.05	
54	240	Basement	6	24 x24 x5	Drivebelt Pulley for Midget Marvel	1996.06	
55	176	Basement	4	10.75 x5.75 x16	Iron Ice Tongs	1996.6.2	
56	074	Office Storage Shelf 4, Box 2	-	9 x3.5 x4	Double Pulley, wood and metal	1996.7.1	
57	073	Office Storage Shelf 4, Box 2	-	15 x4 x4.5	Single Pulley, wood and metal	1996.7.2	
58	072	Office Storage Shelf 4, Box 2	-	9 x4.5 x4.5	Double Pulley, wood and metal	1996.7.3	
59	002	Grinding Floor	1	83 x26 x54	Separating Machine (a); Sifters #4, 8, 12, 18, 20 (b-f); Hopper Bin (g)	1996.08	** "Cranston Scouring Polishing/Separating Machine for roller mill", 002b-g not cataloged in existing records
60	006 b	Grinding Floor	2	15.5 x14 x15	Speed Indicator	1996.09	
61	006 a	Grinding Floor	2	103 x54 x95	Midget Mill	1996.10	

An Example Inventory

Key features include:

A catalog or accession number, Location, Dimensions, Description

Always consider inventory sheets as reference guides for your documentation.

- They are supplemental and should not be the *entirety* of your documentation.

An effective inventory includes...

- Catalog number
 - whatever your unique inventory number is for the object
- Location
 - easily understood and does not incorporate abbreviations or codes
- Identifying features
 - basic description, dimensions

The time you are conducting your inventory is also a good time to take some notes on the condition of each piece.



Disaster Planning

Facilities and Risk Management Standards

It is incumbent upon museums to ensure the safety of their staff and visitors, maintain their buildings and grounds, and minimize risk to the collections that they preserve for future generations.

Conscious, proactive identification of the risks that could potentially harm people and collections, and appropriate allocation of resources to reduce these risks are vital to museum management.

Disaster Planning

A museum should manage risk to ensure: that risks to people (visitors, staff, neighbors) and to collections are accurately identified and assessed; that appropriate methods are employed to avoid, block, mitigate, share and assume or insure against risk; and that resources are appropriately allocated so as to have the greatest effect on reducing risk to people, facilities and collections.

Workshops: objectives, participants and schedule

- Workshop 1- Governance
- Workshop 2- Collections Management
- Workshop 3- Operations & Facilities
- Workshop 4- Interpretation (full-day)
- Workshop 5- Branding/Marketing
- Workshop 6- Key Partners (1/2 day)
- Public Scoping- 3 Different Sessions
- Workshop 7- Interpretation Plan Review



Thank you

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