

Mount Desert Island Historical Society  
Collections Policy  
4-2021

This document updates and revises the previous Collections Policy adopted by the Board in October 2014. It reflects changes in the Mission, Vision, and Strategic Plan of the Historical Society as well as addresses processes for digital-born and digital-surrogate items, and abandoned property.

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, Director of Operations, Collections Coordinator, 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. Direct oversight of the collections is managed by the Executive Director in partnership with the Collections Committee of the Board.

II. Mission, Vision, Values

The mission of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society is to foster meaningful engagement with the histories of Mount Desert Island. Its vision is to create an island-wide community working together to promote appreciation for the histories of Mount Desert Island.

The Society values free access to historic resources. Believing we are a steward of history, which is a common resource, we strive to grant free access to materials virtually, through appointments to work with the collections in person, and through research and scholarship published in our annual journal *Chebacco*, exhibits, and programs.

III. Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics

The Society has a Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Policy guiding the work of the Board, staff, and volunteers. This policy recognizes that collections are not financial or tangible assets, but are held by the Society in the public trust. Guided by best practices established for museums, proceeds from the sale of any collections are to be restricted to collections acquisition or direct care. No board member, staff, or volunteer may benefit from the sale of collections, or purchase collections sold through public auction. For specific ethics regarding the collection, refer to the Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Policy.

IV. Scope of Collections

The Society collects documents, images, publications, oral histories, artwork, and objects that help tell island-wide stories. Acquisitions are accepted primarily through donation or facsimile, but on rare occasions an object may be purchased with prior approval of the Collections Committee.

Many communities on the island have a historical society or library that collects and shares resources specific to the history of that community. The Society differs from other island collecting organizations through its focus on people, events, industry, and trends that impacted the island as a whole. Collections will only be considered for accession into the permanent collection if they meet criteria listed in the acquisitions section.

The strengths of the Society's collections are in its archive and image collection, which documents the lives of year-round and summer residents through diaries, journals, images, photo albums, blueprints, and correspondence. These collections are scanned and made digitally accessible, and are used for research, genealogy, and reference. The Society cares for three dimensional collections that are important to the story of the Island, but also have representative three dimensional objects that often do not fit the collecting criteria and should be reviewed for deaccession.

Future collecting, especially of three dimensional objects, should be guided by a gap analysis with objects being accepted that have direct histories to the island, or complement and enhance the archive. Examples of this are the LaRue Spiker Collection, which has a combination of archival and three dimensional materials, and the Champlain Society. Curating collections that combine archival and three dimensional materials shall guide collecting priorities in the future.

The current collection includes (as of 2019):

1. Archival material (5,952 letters, papers, manuscripts, newspaper articles, pamphlets, maps and nautical charts, architectural drawings, oral histories, ephemeral material);
2. Photographs (6,798 prints, slides, negatives, cabinet cards, ambrotypes, daguerreotypes, albums);
3. Books (902);
4. Objects (1,472 chairs, tables, textiles, cradles, musical instruments, nautical objects, clock, signs, paintings, tools, and other man-made objects).

The categories 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 known as the Lewis Gerrish Jr. Collection (Architectural Drawings and papers)
10. Robert W. Patterson Collection (Architectural Drawings and papers)
11. LaRue Spiker (1912-1995) Collection (papers, photographs)
12. Map Collections (maps, nautical charts, atlases, including a 1776 des Barres chart of MDI and an 1855 map of the U.S.)
13. MDI Marathon Collection
14. Oral History Collection
15. Papers, objects & photographs by and about early Mount Desert Island families, e.g., Somes, Richardson, Gilley
16. Champlain Society Logs, Journals, and Photographs

#### V. Strategic Plan

The strategic plan for the Mount Desert Island Historical Society, as applies to Collections, is to:

- A. Increase access: complete a full inventory of the collection. Collections are made freely

accessible through online resources available on the Society's website and the digital archive of the History Trust, other online resources such as Maine Memory Network, or as new opportunities are presented. Physical and intellectual access to the collections is made available through exhibits, publications, scholarship, and partnerships.

- B. Guided by newly established collecting parameters, conduct a gap analysis to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the collection. Targeted deaccessioning and solicitation of new acquisitions will take place to strengthen the collection and the stories the Society is able to tell.
- C. Improve digital record keeping practices guided by a newly created Collections Procedures manual created in tandem with the Collections Policy. Clean existing data records in Past Perfect according to these standards and procedures.

#### VI. Authority

There is a Collections Committee led by a Chair and composed of Board members, the Executive Director, and one or more at-large-members of the Society. The Executive Director has the authority to accept donations to the collection, but shall seek approval from the committee for items available to purchase.

This committee has the authority to review and accept objects for the collection if such items are offered for purchase, or do not meet the criteria for collecting but warrant a possible exception. The committee consults with the Board of Directors when considering an item for purchase. The committee also reviews objects recommended for de-accession and approves the means of disposal.

#### VII. Acquisitions and Accessions

- I. Acquisitions held in temporary custody (obtained with a Temporary Custody form; ownership not necessarily transferred pending review and approval)
- II. Accessions (formally added to collection through Deed of Gift and cataloged)
- III. Education collection are items owned by the Society but not accessioned into the permanent collection.

#### A. Documentation, records, inventory, and storage

- a. The Society shall resume entering accessions into a log-book. Historic index cards of the collection are retained in collections storage. Deeds of Gift are retained in a binder organized by last name of the binder. This is not ideal and a better system should be arranged in the near future
- b. The Society uses Past Perfect museum software to accession, catalog, and track all collections records. Past Perfect on-line is used to digitally share the collection on the Society's website
- c. Every item that is left at the Society must be documented with the name, address, phone number, and email address for the owner
- d. A Temporary Custody form will be signed and the owner and Society will each retain a copy
- e. Once it has been determined whether or not the item will be accepted, it will either be returned to the owner, or a Deed of Gift will be issued to transfer title to the Society
- f. Accessioned items are entered into Past Perfect along with the history and

- significance, storage location, condition report, and digital image
- g. Currently collections are not regularly inventoried. A system for spot inventories should be identified and implemented
  - h. Objects are stored in archival boxes whenever possible, or under plastic or cloth if they are an odd size. Padding should be used to ensure structural integrity.
  - i. Labels shall be adhered to the outside of the storage container to limit handling of the object itself. Post-it notes or other temporary adhesives are not acceptable as they are prone to fall off. Sticker labels should indicate the accession number and object name for the collections located in each storage unit (shelf and box)
  - j. If an object is moved within or outside of storage a note must be made to Past Perfect
  - k. Only accessioned objects are permitted in storage. Temporary custody objects are to be kept in the schoolhouse or collections staff office unless otherwise directed by the Executive Director

B. 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. Furthermore acquisitions must meet at least one of the basic requirements, and at least one of the relevance questions:

Basic requirements:

- Clear MDI provenance
- Clear title
- Is it a duplicate? Is it a better example? Is it in better/worse condition?
- Can we care for it?

Mount Desert Island History Relevance Questions

- Does it demonstrate patterns of change over time?
- Does it connect history to science, art, literature, environment, or other non-history topics?
- Does it speak to the power of place?
- Does it show connections or relationships between communities on the island?
- Does it help us better understand a current issue on MDI?

C. 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.

D. A receipt for the object shall be entered in the Past Perfect database (temporary custody form) and a copy given to the donor with the explanation that the Executive Director 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

1. Upon acceptance into the collection, donors will receive a Deed of Gift to be signed by the donor and the Executive Director, collections coordinator 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.

2. A catalog record (or records) is/are then established in the Past Perfect database by the collections coordinator, curator, or trained volunteer following established procedures as outlined in the Collections Procedures manual.

E. 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 make a recommendation to the Board for approval of purchases.

F. Copyright, fair use, and licensing:

The Society shall make all efforts to secure copyright and other legal permissions at the time of donation, with the understanding that the donor may not own or know the status of copyright. As a small organization the Society does not have the resources to track and trace copyright and other restrictions on the collection. Rather this work will be done as needed for specific items from the collection that might be used in such a manner that could infringe on copyright, fair use, or other licensing laws. All efforts shall be made to comply with the most current laws and best practices for the field.

VIII. 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. Objects should not be deaccessioned unless clear title to the object is known and ownership is held by the Society. Items found in the collection that do not have a Deed of Gift are considered abandoned property and shall not be deaccessioned without first completing legal guidelines established for abandoned property.
3. 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.
4. Missing objects should not be de-accessioned.

B. The Executive Director or Collections Coordinator shall advise the Collections Committee about objects it recommends for de-accession prior to any action, considering whether the object meets the basic and relevant questions listed in acquisitions, and the following criteria:

1. Object does not meet collection criteria, lacks physical integrity, endangers other objects, has deteriorated beyond usefulness;
2. Is a duplicate to another item in the collection;
3. Object requires storage or conservation the Society is unable to provide;
4. Object is no longer appropriate to the Society's mission

C. Undeeded objects

1. Objects that have not been accessioned with an accompanying Deed of Gift or title are considered abandoned property and treated according to current Maine State Law. A spreadsheet tracking the entire Abandoned Property process should be maintained for

audit purposes.

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. Donate to another island, regional, or state historical society, museum, or public collection
2. Transfer to Educational/Research Collection.
3. Return to the donor. This option can only be applied if the donor did not take a tax deduction, and if the item has sentimental or personal connection to the donor.
4. 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, in accordance with the Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Policy. Proceeds from any sale shall be used solely for acquisitions or expenses related to the collection, not for general operations.
5. Destroy

Note: Accession numbers shall be removed from the objects prior to disposal.

### IX. 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 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.
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
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.

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.

## X. Collection Care

A. Climate: 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.
2. Other rooms at the Sound School House are heated and air-conditioned.
3. 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. Objects are on display seasonally and not stored on-site in the off-season. Objects sensitive to fluctuations in temperature and humidity should have limited exposure during the summer season, ideally rotating half way through the summer for similar objects as available. If this is not an option, sensitive objects should be in a case to slow the impacts of these changes.

### 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

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 and not leaving food in buildings overnight;
3. Infrequently and temporarily introducing live plants or flowers into the building;

4. Enclosing new acquisitions in plastic bags to monitor for pest activity
5. Treating for pests according to current best practices.

#### D. Security, Fire

1. Only the year-round staff and others on a “need to know” basis shall know the combination for lock boxes.
2. At some point, automated fire-alarm and security systems should be considered for the Selectmen's Building and the Somesville Museum.

#### E. Insurance

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

### XI. 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.
3. Some collections information is not publically accessible based on monetary value, sensitive and restricted donor information, storage location, etc.



### C. Digitization

The Society collects and cares for several categories of digital resources. Most digital collections are acquired through oral history projects such as History Harvest, which represents a combination of born-digital material (oral history recording, digital photograph of subject, etc.), and digital surrogate materials, which are scanned from the original source material provided by the owner during his/her oral history interview. This body of material should be viewed as a collection and all subject to the same processing standards. In the case of oral history interviews, scanned albums, new media, or scanned surrogates that enhance the current collection, or fill in gaps in the collection, these digital items should be added to the permanent collection, cataloged and described to the same standards as the physical archival collection, and treated to the same preservation standards. A digital file will be added to the permanent collections folder on the server and saved to the Cloud, as managed and updated with the IT services employed by the Society. Acquisitions of born-digital or approved digital surrogates are subject to the same criteria, acceptance, and management criteria as the physical collections.

Digital surrogates that are not part of a larger collection or do not meet the above criteria will be treated as educational and resource materials and not cataloged. A separate file system shall be created on the shared server in the collections folder to organize and preserve these files. An inventory list shall be created and maintained to serve as a finding aid, not as an accession record.

All digital collections will be stored on the Cloud and updated to new storage systems as they may become available from time to time. The IT firm employed by the Society will help with this transfer and management system as needed.

## XII. 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.