

Ideally Reality:
Alignment of Deaccession Policy and Emerging Practice in History Museums

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Abstract

Deaccessioning artifacts from museums has become a widely accepted practice as a tool for responsible and sustainable collections management. Standard deaccession policies have been developed to govern the ethical practices, and are valuable tools for accountability. However, there is a lack of research into practical application of deaccession policies in museums.

This study is designed to explore the alignment of current best practices found in policies with the emerging application within history museums. The research relies on the analysis of written policies from museums and discussions regarding their deaccession projects for consistencies, and the prevalent practices as they coincide with the policies. The purpose of this study is to determine which parts of the ideal process of deaccessioning represented by policy are manifest when applied to the wide variety of material found in history museum collections. Nine museums from across the country were selected to participate in the study. Eight submitted a copy of the deaccession policy used in their institution, and staff from each museum participated in a semi-structured interview to discuss their deaccessioning practices.

The results of this research show that although transferring objects is the advocated preference for the majority of museums, in practice the disposal methods chosen rely heavily on the object's physical and historical integrity. While the objects with strong documentation and good physical condition are often transferred, the majority of deaccessioned objects are found lacking in significance and disposed of through sales. This seems to support the need for further understanding of the links between deaccession criteria and disposal method as a valuable area to address accountability.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The "reason that the ideal and the real are so far apart in the museum world is that we assume - incorrectly - that our collections are going to last forever. In claiming to provide preservation in perpetuity we are faced with the problem of defining 'perpetual' (Washburn, 1984, p. 5)." This thesis explores the ideals represented in policy and the emerging practices in history museum deaccessioning. The lens of deaccessioning is used to identify areas of overlap or dissonance in the management of these collections which encompass a wide range of material types and values. Deaccessioning has widely been accepted as a tool for sustainable collections management, and while a considerable amount of research has been done on the ethics of deaccessioning, the actual practice remains somewhat unclear (Merriman, 2008). Research to expand the understanding of deaccession practices is significant because it attempts to fill a hole in the museum field's ability to address emerging deaccession practices as they align with the ideals represented in policies.

The Oxford-English definition of 'deaccession' is "to remove an entry for (an exhibit, book) from the accessions registrar of a museum, library, etc., usu. in order to sell the item concerned (OED Online, 2011)." However, the museum field professionally defines it as "the permanent removal of an object that was once accessioned into a museum collection (Malaro, 2004, p. 331)." The Oxford-English definition reinforces the perception of deaccessioning as a practice associated with selling objects. Although museums and permanence are married in the public consciousness (Miller S. , 2011), collections gathered and maintained in the public's trust must be reviewed periodically to shape and reshape collections in order to best serve the

museum's purpose as a "hallmark of a sound, dynamic and farsighted approach to collections management (Weil S. E., 1997, p. 64)." It is a process which requires objectivity that can be supported through the development of clear policies and assessment tools for the removal of material that is found to have no potential for enjoyment or use is difficult to justify expending resources to maintain (Merriman, 2008). The inclusion of criteria in policies is important to provide assessment of significance, subjective, criteria that can be articulated in a comparative manner (Young, 1999). Finally, these policies must be strong enough to prevent inappropriate deaccession activity, but also contain enough specificity to facilitate effective application (Webb, 2011).

Deaccession policies are important for the demonstrably accountable practice of deaccessioning in all museums. However, policy and professional guidelines that address deaccessioning practices in museums have been rooted in ethical concerns (Byrne, 2000). The policy guidance that has been developed focuses on legal and financial considerations, which neglects the assessment of the artifacts or dealing with disposal in a practical way (Robbins, 2011).

The question is how history museums apply the ideals set forth by policies in collections of varying historical significance and monetary value to determine the areas of overlap and where the two may be incongruent. To accomplish this, policies have been gathered from nine history museums and staff involved in deaccession projects were interviewed about the practices. This research seeks to expand the museum fields understanding of how ideal policy and real practices are managed within history museums collections.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

A review of literature reveals that while much attention has been paid to policies, ethics and financial considerations of deaccessioning, relatively little has been focused on practices until recently. The 2011 publication *Museums and the Disposals Debate* compiled and edited by Peter Davies includes valuable case studies that illustrate assessment rubrics and disposal strategies. These cases come from Europe, Canada and the United States. Literature about the policies of museum deaccessioning has been gathered from many sources, notably the American Association of Museums (AAM) publication compiled by Stephen E. Weil, *A Deaccession Reader*. This book includes a report on deaccession policies gathered from 79 museums among other essays that discuss the risks and rewards of deaccessioning. Together this literature reflects the attitudes of museum professionals regarding both policy and practice that provide foundational guidance for this research.

The tangible object as the unique territory of museums is described by museum director Steven Miller who writes that “museums exist because of an assumption that physical objects have value...When acquiring an item a museum is saying that for one reason or another the item is worthy of being preserved by and for the general citizenry...central to this scheme is an overall notion that assigns precedence first and foremost to the physical well-being of museum collections (Miller S. H., 1997, p. 51).” Although there are many types of museums, the American Association of Museums (AAM) states that the common denominator across all fields is that these institutions make a “unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things of this world (American Association of Museums, 2000).” The Museum Association (MA), of Great Britain defines museums as institutions that “enable

people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society (Museum Association, 2008).” However, others have proposed that the well-being of the collection is not always best served by permanence; “The object can become a fetish that, if we merely worship it, impedes our understanding of the object itself and its place in our society. And, in the process of being worshiped, it sometimes crumbles in our hands (Washburn, 1984, p. 15).” To alleviate this, Manchester Museum Director Nicholas Merriman advocates the need for greater deaccession activity with the view that to be truly sustainable it is “helpful to think of museum collections as ecosystems or habitats which need managing, developing, sometimes growing and sometimes cutting back to prevent choking. (Merriman, 2008, p. 18).” Steven Weil who at one time likened deaccessioning to the temptation of robbing a cookie jar for funds (Weil S. , 1992), advanced to the perspective that museums which have gathered and maintained artifacts for the public must periodically refine and reshape collections in order to best serve the museum's purpose as a "hallmark of a sound, dynamic and farsighted approach to collections management (Weil S. E., 1997, p. 64).”

It has been noted that deaccessioning from history museums is different than deaccessioning from art museums (Pogrebin, *Museum Sells Pieces of Its Past, Reviving a Debate*, 2010). History collections pose a unique set of challenges for deaccessioning decisions due to the variety of material that they encompassed. “In practice it would seem that the public reacts with greater emotion to the disposal of a painting than of objects from the collections of museums of history or science. The sensitivity is connected principally with the money to be made from these sales (Van De Werdt, 2011, p. 435).” These collections are made up of “the

objects of everyday life, historic events, contemporary culture (ephemera, etc.) collections, instruments that illustrate the history of science and technology, stamps, coins, and even historic sites and buildings. In this field occasional artifacts may be justly regarded as irreplaceable aspects of our heritage, and once sheltered under an umbrella of public institutional protections can never again justifiably pass into private hands." He goes on to state that "the mere mention of removing any item, no matter how neglected, from a museum's collection is the surest way to arouse controversy, anguish and rage (Barr, 1997, p. 103)." Nick Poole, the CEO of the Collections Trust in the UK, has countered that museums maintain these objects not simply to possess them, but to activate them in service of helping "tell the story of key moments in human history and achievement," and that "collecting is not a single, consistent process. It is tumbling, organic, opportunistic. It happens in waves, in fits and starts according to the availability of material, money and enthusiasm (Poole, 2011)." The role of the collection in a museum's mission is promoted by Michael Taylor of the National Museum of Scotland, "a museum is made a museum by its collections, so that its collecting policy, past and present, helps define its very role and identity (Taylor, 1999, p. 120)." Similarly, "when people think of museums it is their collections that come to mind...Most of the collections have been around for a long time and it is assumed that they will continue to be (Miller S. S., *Subtracting Collections: Practice Makes Perfect (Usually)*, 2011, p. 394)." The implication being that "the distinguishing feature of making history in the museum is the act of collecting...historians working in museums must not only work with and through materials...but also take responsibility for its long term survival (Kavanagh, 1999, p. 79)." Although, as Tomislav Sola, a Museology professor points out these objects, "do not make a museum, but merely form a

collection (Sola, 1999, p. 188).” Collections and active collecting for perpetuity have defined the way that the public views museums. The "reason that the ideal and the real are so far apart in the museum world is that we assume - incorrectly - that our collections are going to last forever. In claiming to provide preservation in perpetuity we are faced with the problem of defining 'perpetual' (Washburn, 1984, p. 5).”

Museum professionals have recognized the potential opportunities that deaccessioning affords as "improving collections quality, sharpening its focus and broadening its applications. It can also render a collection more manageable. Deaccessioning can also save on storage space and economize on collections management and energy costs. It can also give objects a second or even third life (Van De Werdt, 2011, p. 454)." The potential benefits of deaccessioning are articulated in policies of the Museum Association (MA), the UK's professional association of museums, as improved care for the object, increased access and enjoyment by the public, more appropriate contextualization, removal of hazardous material, resources that are freed for other parts of the collection, optimization of space that allows future collections growth (Museum Association, 2008, p. 8). When accomplished with transparency and responsibility, better relations with other museums and donors are additional possible side effects cited by Steven Miller, an adjunct professor at New York University who has been the director of several museums (Miller S. S., *Guilt Free Deaccessioning*, 1997). Finally, the freeing up of space allowance for future collections development has been identified as a main motivator and benefit of the deaccession process (Betenia, Conaty, Herr, Lounsberry, & Melemenis, 2011). These benefits are of ever increasing importance to demonstrate responsible management of public resources and justify increased support for museum activities (Bursell, 1999). All of these

benefits are the long term gain after short term pain that deaccessioning could afford a museum (Van De Werdt, 2011).

Many museum professionals in the United States feel that their relationship with donors is paramount due to the fact that museums acquire approximately 90% of their objects as donations (Malaro, 2004). The assumption is that they will remain in the collection and be maintained in perpetuity. Marie Malaro, a legal expert in the museum field, goes on to cite the waning tax incentives for charitable donation in concert with the reliance on donors and the fact that any museum can “survive as long as enough people are willing to support it (Malaro, 2004, p. 336),” to explain the need to deaccession carefully. The sensitive nature of placing a value on heritage has significant implications for the public in whose trust museums use collection objects (Van De Werdt, 2011). Steven Miller expresses his concern, “in my experience, gift offers have gone down and I suspect part of the reason is that potential donors worry that museums may not keep what is given to them (Miller S. S., *Subtracting Collections: Practice Makes Perfect (Usually)*, 2011, p. 401).” Part of the reluctance is the fear of losing the objects that have been donated from public accessibility into private hands (Miller S. H., 1997). In history museums, donated objects often represent personal histories and the lives of individuals (Kavanagh, 1999). These are “objects that are called upon by scholars, researchers, the general public and others who require information of all sorts. Most seek to examine objects in the collections, and to have to say 'No, that item was sold and we don't know where it is' seems to be a contradiction of that function (Miller S. H., 1997, p. 59).”

Many museum professionals seem to believe that public support can be maintained if transparency is upheld as a part of the deaccession process. Mark A. Greene, of the American

Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming, views deaccessioning as a positive practice which substantiates a well-run museum (Greene, 2006). He states that we have “not given our constituents enough credit when we presume that they would be hostile to us in response to any whiff of reappraisal and deaccessions (Greene, 2006).” Similarly, Franz Klingender of the Canadian Agriculture Museum admits that public accountability means that “although we cannot expect them to understand the intricacies of collection development we must expect that they will know enough to ask why we have multiple examples of an artifact that to their eyes all look exactly the same (Klingender, 2011, p. 585).”

Museums have begun to involve the public in deaccession activities. This serves the dual purposes of educating the public about the challenges and implications of caring for objects in perpetuity as well as securing their trust and demonstrating responsibility (Davies, 2011). When the Centraal Museum in the Netherlands deaccessioned 1,470 works of art in 2006, 750 were transferred to other museums, and the works that they were unable to transfer were shown in the exhibit *The Disposal Strategy of the Centraal Museum* for five weeks prior to being publically auctioned (Van De Werdt, 2011, p. 439). In the United Kingdom, the East Grinstead Museum held an exhibit titled *Disposal?* in 2009 at the University College London (Hadfield, 2011). *Disposal?* addressed the challenges of deaccessioning when dealing with history collections. Agatha Christie’s picnic basket, an antique anaesthetic kit, planetary photographs from NASA, soil samples from the Channel Tunnel, and the skull of a hippopotamus were exhibited. Visitors voted to deaccession an object both before and after viewing the exhibit (Das, Passmore, & Dunn, 2011). After the exhibit, 38.3% of visitors changed their vote on which artifact to deaccession, and polling indicated that the majority of visitors felt that their

understanding of deaccessioning increased (Das, Passmore, & Dunn, 2011). The museum reported that the most important consideration was how useful an object was to the mission and if it was actively being used. The next most important criteria for the public were irreplaceability and connection to the community (Das, Passmore, & Dunn, 2011, p. 191). The UCL used the resulting understanding of community priorities when writing their collections policy in order to ensure strategic collections management in the best interest of the community (Das, Passmore, & Dunn, 2011, p. 193).

In the United States, the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA) has been actively and transparently deaccessioning objects guided by former director Maxwell Anderson's emphasis on the value of transparency for museum management. This has catalyzed the development of the Dashboard feature on their website, an innovative way to communicate with their stakeholders.

"The IMA website lists objects to be deaccessioned (sold transferred or exchanged), with valuations provided. The public can follow the disposition of deaccessioned works online or search for them, since we post the reasons for deaccessioning, sale date, funds received, and links to works acquired from the proceeds of sales. The steps we are taking toward transparency at the IMA are born of an instinct to rethink how a museum should operate in today's electronic fishbowl culture. The ultimate objective is to raise standards of the profession as we step into uncharted territory (Anderson M. L., 2010)."

The value of making deaccession information publically available is essential to managing the potential backlash (Greene, 2006) that has led to current ethical guidelines that focus heavily

on ethics and the use of funds (Wirka, 2011). Kathleen T. Byrne, a Registrar for the National Park Service acknowledges that the policies have been in an effort to “safeguard against these problems and to achieve objectivity in the deaccession process (Byrne, 2000).” One policy reviewer stated that “Guidelines handle the issue of disposal from a legal point of view without paying attention to the value aspect of the process or dealing with disposal as the ultimate phase of collection management (Robbins, 2011, p. 494).” An analysis of policy by Helen Wirka, the Associate Administrator of the Carlyle House Historic Park, illustrates that, “focusing primarily upon financially motivated disposal to make money will simply detract from the concept that the practice of disposal is good for a collection and can benefit communities and institutions by increasing a museum's sustainability (Wirka, 2011).”

Museums are held accountable by several constraining forces including professional organizations, self-imposed policies and public opinion (Burgess & Shane, 2011). Voluntary application of these policies means that legally, museums are free to dispose of their objects as they see fit (Malaro, 2004). The overarching influence that seems to motivate museum policies and their adherence to them is public opinion (Burgess & Shane, 2011). Since the issue of deaccessioning is self-regulated, self-imposed and self-enforced, Burgess and Shane consider it a policy monopoly that reacts with just enough regulation to satisfactorily manage the public and media threats to the monopoly (Burgess & Shane, 2011, p. 182). The policies represent the minimum considerations to maintain ethical standards (Malaro, 2004).

The American Association of Museums (AAM) is the central accreditation and policy resource for all museums in the United States. They encompass all museum types and share oversight of history museums field specific policy with the American Association for State and

Local History (AASLH). Wirka compares the AAM's addressing of deaccessioning to that of the Museum Association (MA) in the UK, which regulates a similarly diverse body of museums, by critiquing the "lack of specificity" in the language of the AAM's deaccession references. In her policy review, she praises the pro-active research that the MA did prior to revising its policies to understand and "reflect current practice" in museums motivated by disposal in order to reduce expenditure and refine collections rather than to raise funds (Wirka, 2011).

The AASLH to which the AAM refers history museum professionals for history collection policies defines their mission as providing "leadership and support for its members who preserve and interpret state and local history in order to make the past more meaningful to all Americans (American Association for State and Local History, 2005)." Endorsement from the AAM and AASLH demonstrates adherence to the best practices established by these institutions. The National Park Service (NPS) is another resource referenced by museums (Miller S. S., *Guilt Free Deaccessioning*, 1997). The NPS has standardized practices throughout its many facilities. Their *Museum Handbook* guides management of historic collections which "may document individual or community life and social, cultural, political, economic, and technological trends and events. As a whole the diverse assemblages of NPS history collections document continuity and change over time in the nation."

The AAM acknowledges deaccessioning activities by requiring museums to submit their deaccession policies for review in the accreditation process to demonstrate that they provide "standards for exercising good judgment (American Association of Museums, 2004)." In their *Code of Ethics*, last revised in 2000, the AAM references the ethics of deaccessioning in the same bullet point as accessioning and loans stating that "acquisition, disposal and loan activities

conform to its mission and public trust responsibilities,” and goes on to state that “disposal of collections through sales, trade or research activities is solely for the advancement of the museum’s mission. Proceeds from the sale of nonliving collections are to be used consistent with the established standards of the museums discipline, but in no event shall they be used for anything other than the direct care of collections (American Association of Museums, 2000).”

The AAM’s Online *Information Center* provides documents to support members in deaccession practices. The *Ethics of Deaccessioning*, states that “a museum’s governing body must make responsible choices regarding the content of the collections,” including the ability to “remove from the collection material that does not relate to the museums mission, and that the museum does not have the resources to preserve (American Association of Museums, 2005, p. 1).” For further guidance, the AAM recommends that history museums consult the AASLH (American Association of Museums, 2005, p. 2). Additionally, they provide a guide for selling material through online auctions without damaging a museum’s reputation (American Association of Museums, 2004). The AASLH references deaccessioning in one bullet point of their *Code of Ethics* which states that “Collections shall not be deaccessioned or disposed of in order to provide financial support for institutional operations, facilities maintenance, or any reason other than the preservation or acquisition of collections (American Association for State and Local History, 2002).”

These policies focus discussion on potential financial consequences to guard against the idea that, “museums are neither merchandise marts nor esthetic stock exchanges. They are repositories of precious records (Rewald, 1997).” Concern over seemingly subjective deaccessions and sales create concern that has led to the financially focused policies we have

today (Miller S. H., 1997). Sales of monetarily high valued deaccession material are still the most publicized exposure received by deaccessioning, and it makes the news with disturbing frequency.

Publicity of deaccession sales is usually more of a consideration for art museums (Van De Werdt, 2011). However, there have been recent examples of history museums selling high value objects as well. In 2005, the Rhode Island Historical Society planned to sell a Colonial-era desk, the most valuable object in their collection, for an appraised ten million dollars at auction (Edgers, 2005). In February of 2010, the Lynden Pioneer Museum, in Blaine Washington, sold 42 pieces from a collection of Native American material at auction for \$703,000 as part of a strategy to establish an endowment (Relyea, 2010). And in another example, the Museum of Northern Arizona raised \$947,115 through auction sales of twenty-one works of art from its collection that they used for payroll and other operating expenses resulting in loss of AAM accreditation in 2002 (Bruner, 2007).

In research conducted by the MA in 2007, three-quarters of museums polled wanted to increase deaccessioning, but time and resources that are required to deaccession responsibly were the main deterrents (Wirka, 2011). The revised code of ethics and resulting *Disposal Tool Kit* were developed to help facilitate the actual practice and to support museums in deaccession activities with the goal to “make the disposal process more accessible to various types of institutions and to create open lines of communication and learning (Wirka, 2011, p. 351).” The MA code of ethics states that “disposal can improve access to, or the use, care or context of items or collections. Responsible, curatorially-motivated disposals takes place as part of a museums long-term collections policy, in order to increase public benefit derived from

museum collections (Museum Association, 2008)." This ethical standard coupled with the affirmation to "balance the duty of maintaining and enhancing collections for future generations with that of providing appropriate services to today's public (Museum Association, 2008)," supports their belief that "museums need to ensure their collections are well managed, actively used and sustainable," a stance that "encourages museums to take a more active approach to appropriate disposal, whilst ensuring safeguards are in place to protect collections and public trust (Museum Association, 2008)."

The Registrar's Committee of the AAM (RCAAM) compiled a deaccession report in 1997 with information gathered from 79 museums, twenty-two of which were history museums. The majority, thirty, were art museums. The report analyzed the written deaccession policies for the criteria, disposal and ethics that the museums articulated for deaccessioning. The goal of the report was to "provoke thought and discussion, and to encourage an assessment of the readers own procedures," and to "distinguish which types of museums use which elements of the process and which ones use elements of the process most frequently (Gilboe, 1997, p. 205)."

At the time of the report, it was noted that a majority of the responding museums expressed that they were undergoing a review of their deaccession policies, and that they were hoping to further discussion that could help guide their work (Gilboe, 1997, p. 206). It seems, however that none of the information gathered for the task force's report was utilized in the AAM's revised code of ethics in 2000 (Wirka, 2011).

The irrelevance of an object to mission or collection scope was a criteria for 57% of museums overall, and 60% of history museums specifically (Gilboe, 1997, p. 208). Only three (14%) history museums responded with the indication that they consider what the report called

'collections refinement or upgrading' as a reason for deaccessioning (Gilboe, 1997, p. 208). The identification of a more appropriate institution for an artifact was articulated in three history museum policies, but not in any art museum policies (Gilboe, 1997, p. 209). History museums were also more likely to indicate their inability to properly maintain objects, (36% of history museums, 23% of art museums), whereas art museums were more likely to identify the aesthetic merits of the material (43% of art museums, and 4% of history museums) (Gilboe, 1997, p. 209).

The importance of criteria is emphasized by The Glenbow Museum in a deaccession program that began in 1998 and is currently ongoing (Betenia, Conaty, Herr, Lounsberry, & Melemenis, 2011). The cultural history curator has identified that the "major grading challenge was identifying and assessing the historical value of the objects. Only part of the value of the object could be verified by first hand examination; more often than not its value rested in its connections to people and events (Betenia, Conaty, Herr, Lounsberry, & Melemenis, 2011, p. 202)." In history museums this has been a challenge due to the passive collecting that has dominated, when objects have been acquired for their own sake without useful data or associations, which has "neutered the historical record and denied the survival of a tremendous richness of evidence (Kavanagh, 1999, p. 81)." Or, put another way, the "scarcity or non-existence of catalogue records, caused by lack of financial resources, diminishes the value of objects (Vilkuna, Vuorinen, Holma, & Makipelkola, 2011, p. 149)." As explained by Terri Anderson of the National Trust, this can lead to deaccession decisions. "If a mystery mid-20th-century lamp has no documentation in any of our files, shows up on no known inventories, is completely out of character with other known collections, and has a market value of \$10, I am

very comfortable letting such a piece go, after documenting the process as best we can (Anderson T. , 2011)."

There must always be a degree of curatorial judgment, connoisseurship, in the decision making process (Dodd, 2011). While this causes hesitation among some critics of deaccessioning who believe that connoisseurship is a skill lost from collections management and which leads to mistakes in judgment (Grosvenor, 2011). Others take it as a challenge to revive the traditions of connoisseurship within the museum as being capable of "identifying and assessing the importance of artefacts as well as the theoretical models that have been developed or applied to material culture research (Young, 1999, p. 143)." As Stephen Weil points out, when deaccessioning, "it is the same eyes that sell well or poorly as those that buy well or poorly. The director or curator who does not know how to sell properly does not know how to buy (Weil S. E., 1997, p. 69)." The need for a connoisseur who can both weed out and take in is called for as someone who can make collections decisions that are systematic and explicit (Young, 1999). In order to mediate concern for accidental disposal of potentially valuable objects a private art dealer has proposed that one solution may be a standing body of panelists who can help advise museums on a range of materials (Grosvenor, 2011, p. 68). Responses solicited from the public during *Disposal?*, however, indicate that "the majority of visitors trusted museum professionals to make informed decisions, giving the curators confidence to make difficult choices and carry these out (Das, Passmore, & Dunn, 2011, p. 193)."

In the RCAAM report, 36% of history museums cited the inability to responsibly maintain the physical and intellectual integrity of an object as an acceptable reason to

deaccession (Gilboe, 1997, p. 210). The inability to care for objects is exacerbated by the mandate to maintain irrelevant material. "Our backlogs are bloated with stuff we should not keep; our preservation problems are magnified by brittle or moldy stuff we should never have taken. This is the dirty job we have said our profession would do. Let us do it (Greene, 2006, p. 15)." This unfortunate truth is illustrated by the Idaho State Historical Society which risked losing AAM accreditation in 2007 due to their inability to document, manage and maintain a tremendous backlog of 250,000 objects (Miller J. , 2007).

Another 14% of history museums noted specifically that the identification of a more appropriate institution was a valid reason to deaccession (Gilboe, 1997, p. 209). History museums are more concerned with finding proper homes and the final disposal of the object as opposed to potential generation of proceeds than other museums (Malaro, 2004, p. 43). Steven Miller iterates that regardless of other considerations, "If the best interests of all three (institution/collection/public) are served by removing an item from a museum, without endangering the item itself, than deaccessioning is probably being carried out correctly. When commercial considerations reign supreme, the process is grossly polluted (Miller S. H., 1997, p. 61)." When disposing of objects to other museums, however, it is important to keep in mind that "evolution must be done so with sustainability in mind and recognition that the best way to deal with this may well be though the exit of objects that have not proven their worth in their present location but may well be able to elsewhere or may simply not be suitable to a museum collection at all (Hadfield, 2011, p. 95)."

Redundancy was another criteria for more than two thirds of history museum deaccession policies (Gilboe, 1997, p. 210). This is illustrated by the East Grinstead Museum's

challenge of acquiring 3,000 objects from a hospital museum that had closed (Hadfield, 2011). In the face of the imminent limits of storage, the museum made necessary refinement decisions (Hadfield, 2011, p. 260). Searches of the collection database showed that they had a significant amount of redundancy within their collection exemplified by fifteen ginger beer bottles in varying condition and with varying degrees of provenance connecting them to the East Grinstead community (Hadfield, 2011, p. 262). In order to determine which bottles to keep and those to deaccession, the museum developed a rubric for making objective deaccession decisions (Hadfield, 2011) by scoring objects according to condition, uniqueness within the collection as a whole, documentation, and potential for use. The review process identified seven of the fifteen bottles as 'total duplications,' allowing their responsible, reasoned removal. The East Grinstead Museum's deaccessioning project is helping the museum to "become more sustainable by ensuring that information and knowledge about its collection in its entirety is up to date and that each item within the collection is there for a justifiable reason. In this way it can continue to collect and acquire items and thus allow its collection to evolve and be better managed (Hadfield, 2011, p. 274)."

Selling objects publically as a disposition method was noted in 60% of history museum policies as opposed to 83% of art museum policies (Gilboe, 1997, pp. 230-231). This underscores Marie Malaro's observation that history museums put less stress on the matter of what is done with any proceeds that may accrue from the sale of deaccessioned material (Malaro, 2004). The preferred method of disposal for museums is to transfer objects to ensure that they remain in the public domain. "The risk of losing information that might later be deemed as highly valuable taints all other arguments against the disposal of museum

collections (Brown M. , 2011, p. 109)." Steven Miller, cautions that the main danger of selling collections and their loss from the public domain is their separation from history and provenance. By transferring the objects to other museums, records are kept in-tact, the intellectual and physical integrity of the object is protected and the public trust is upheld (Miller S. S., *Guilt Free Deaccessioning*, 1997, p. 96). However, as the Glenbow Museum has noted, sometimes there is very little interest from others in acquiring the material disclosing that of the 12,000 objects offered for transfer, only 2,000 were desired by other museums, and they have had difficulty finding auction houses interested in cultural objects (Betenia, Conaty, Herr, Lounsberry, & Melemenis, 2011).

Fourteen of the policies mention that this is "the manner in the best interest of the museum, the public and the scholarly community (Gilboe, 1997, p. 226)." This can prove to be one of the most time consuming aspects of deaccessioning in history museums. The responsibility to find more appropriate institutions for objects deaccessioned from a collection can create a greater burden on the museum's time and staff than anticipated (Van De Werdt, 2011). Transferring material "is undoubtedly important, but remains in reality a fairly theoretical construct (Van De Werdt, 2011, p. 447)." The responsibility of finding a home for problematic artifacts, which are significant and yet present management challenges can keep deaccessioned objects from actually being disposed causing them to linger on the museums premises (Klingender, 2011, p. 581).

The Glenbow Museum deaccession project illustrated the many steps taken in finding appropriate homes for deaccessioned material, and staff expressed that the governing boards were surprised and frustrated by the length of time that the process took (Betenia, Conaty,

Herr, Lounsberry, & Melemenis, 2011). Despite the challenges, however, the cultural history collections manager at Glenbow stated that “overall, the process was very positive (Betenia, Conaty, Herr, Lounsberry, & Melemenis, 2011, p. 211).”

The long-term positive effects of deaccessioning are described by the East Grinstead Museum as “limiting the need for removal of items from the collection and work towards a clear and long-term collections strategy and thus collecting with a view to long-term sustainability...This will not only make future periodical assessment and collections reviews easier but will also allow future curatorial staff to trace and understand past decisions made over acquisitions (Hadfield, 2011, p. 276).” Nick Merriman uses the World Commission on Environment and Development’s definition of sustainability, “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Merriman, 2008, p. 18),” to determine the productive and responsible role that deaccessioning plays within a museum collection. To ensure the future of museums and collections, objects must be reassessed “not as possessions, but as opportunities for the creation of relationships. In addition to maintaining objects museums increasingly focus on their use rather than accumulation (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000).”

Professionals who work in museums such as Ellen McAdams at the Glasgow Museum believe it is not realistic, prudent or ethical to expect support for a collection that is not being used and that has no potential for enjoyment or learning. It is then difficult to justify the expenditure of resources to maintain it (Merriman, 2008). However, as the goals of permanence are being challenged and before questions of continued collecting can be addressed, there is a need to assess the state of present museum holdings (Green, 2006).

“Solutions must be found which allow us to accelerate the rate of getting rid of things, but in a way that is accountable, open, practical and efficient...solutions which help make a genuine case for retention of the things we keep and in which we invest so much of our time and effort (Reed, 2011, p. 460).”

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Data for this research comes from the analysis of deaccession policies and semi-structured interviews collected from nine history museums. Six museums were selected from a pool of volunteers solicited through the RCAAM online forum for professional members. Three additional museums were selected through searches for news media coverage of deaccession activities. The interviews focused on the motivations, resources, criteria, disposals, communication with the public, results, and challenges of a deaccession project identified by the participant. This selection resulted in eight deaccession policies and ten interviews for this research. An introduction to each of the nine museums can be found in Appendix A (page 62). The eight deaccession policies are included in Appendix B (page 67).

Deaccession Policies

Eight of the participating museums (The Danish Immigrant Museum, The Grace Museum, The Hopkinton Historical Society, The National WWII Museum, The Shelburne Museum, The North Carolina Museum of History, and the Southern Oregon Historical Society) provided the portion of their collections management policy that addresses deaccessioning. From these policies six categories of criteria were identified for this research: mission, stability, duplication, hazard, accession and provenance. Mission relevance encompasses criteria of museum mission, collection scope and potential for use. The physical integrity of the object and the museum's ability to maintain this are identified as stability. Duplication refers to the depth of representation within the collection. Hazard indicates that the artifact may pose a risk to other objects in the collection or staff. Acquisition refers to the context through which the artifact initially entered the collection such as the legality of the museum's ownership or the

ethical standards by which an object was obtained. Provenance indicates the documentation and historical record of the artifact. These criteria are used to establish an understanding of how museums are focusing their deaccession efforts.

The three methods of disposal identified for this research are transfer, sale and destruction. Transfer refers to maintenance of the public accessibility of the artifact through placement in another museum or educational institution either through gift or exchange. Sale encompasses both third party auctions and third party brokered sales to private collections. Destruction refers to the physical obliteration of the artifact.

Guidance as to the use of proceeds from deaccessioning are defined in three ways for this research. The first reserves funds in a collections fund to be used for expenses related to collections care, artifact maintenance, or the acquisition of new artifacts. Secondly, funds can be restricted acquisitions of new artifacts only. The third guideline restricts the use of deaccession funds to defray the costs of ongoing operation.

Interviews

Qualitative data from personal experiences was gathered from semi-structured interviews with ten museum professionals representing nine museums. A request for professionals to volunteer their deaccession experience was sent through the RCAAM's professional discussion forum online, see Appendix C (page 102). Participation in this forum is voluntary and the recipients of the message represent a range of museum sizes and fields from across the country. The posting specifically requested responses from staff involved in deaccessions from history museums willing to be interviewed. In addition to museums that volunteered responses, several history museums were identified through internet searches for

media coverage in news reports of deaccessioning. These museums were contacted directly through the staff member(s) cited in the media publication.

The semi-structured interviews lasted thirty minutes to an hour and addressed the scope of a project identified by the museum. The voluntary participants were led through their deaccession experience using a list of seven prompts;

- The instigating motivations or context of the deaccession project
- The resources that were consulted prior to deaccessioning
- The deaccession criteria used in practice
- Disposal methods used in practice
- The museum's practices for communicating with the public about deaccessions
- The results of the deaccessioning activity
- The challenges faced while deaccessioning

The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participant. Detailed notes were taken from these recordings. The RCAAM forum post requesting volunteers for this research generated response from twelve museums.

After further explanation of the expected participation in the research one museum chose not to contribute due to concerns for the confidentiality of deaccession information. Two museums replied favorably and began a correspondence, but did not respond to scheduling an interview. Three additional museums responded favorably. However, they were determined to be beyond the scope of this thesis due to the level of volunteers' involvement with the deaccession projects or ability to provide supporting documentation. The remaining six

museums' representatives who responded to the initial request participated in interviews and submitted deaccession policies. They are listed here:

- Angela Stanford, Curator of Collections, Danish Immigrant Museum, IA
- Camille Hunt, Registrar, North Carolina Museum of History, NC
- Heather Coffman, Registrar, Grace Museum, TX
- Katherine Taylor-McBroom, Assistant Registrar, Shelburne Museum, VT
- Shana Hawrylchak, Collections Consultant, Hopkinton Historical Society, NH
- Toni Kiser, Registrar, National WWII Museum, LA

Additionally, four museums' staff were contacted based upon the news media coverage of their deaccession activity. Of these museums, three responded affirmatively to requests for interviews and one museum did not. The three museums that agreed to participate were;

- The Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History
- The Southern Oregon Historical Society
- The Philadelphia History Museum

The Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History (SCMNH) had hired a local historian, Frank Perry, to assess their entire history collection for relevance to their mission as a natural history museum (AZDailySun). In the article published in August of 2011, the museum's director, Dan Harder, explained that the museum had a significant collection of 3,600 historic objects, and that the goal of the project was to eliminate the 5,000 foot off-site storage facility, as well as to "find new homes for items that may be more relevant to other museums or venues. 'We are adding value and access to those items.' (AZDailySun)" Mr. Harder and Mr. Perry were contacted, and both agreed to interviews.

The Philadelphia History Museum (PHM) has been deaccessioning historic and art objects since 2002 when they acquired a large collection from a historical society that closed. In an article it was noted that the museum's preferred method of disposal seemed to be public auction sales, and explained that history museums "resist easy definition and therefore make rigid regulation difficult (Pogrebin, *Museum Sells Pieces of Its Past, Reviving a Debate*, 2010)." The article went on to cite the director of the AAM, Ford W. Bell, as acknowledging that the guidelines for the deaccessioning of historical objects are less clear than those for art (Pogrebin, *Museum Sells Pieces of Its Past, Reviving a Debate*, 2010). The director of the collection, Kristen Froehlich, was contacted and agreed to discuss the museums policies and process in reference to their most recent deaccessioning project to refine the costume collection.

The Southern Oregon Historical Society (SOHS) was identified for deaccessioning and disposals that had been criticized in the media (Mann, 2011). The society also published a list of their deaccessioned artifacts with justifications on their website along with supporting information about the museums policies (Southern Oregon Historical Society, 2012). The Curator of Collections, Tina Reuwsaat, was contacted and agreed to contribute to this research.

Finally, the Historical Society of Olmstead County was contacted due to the appearance of an advertisement in the professional publication *Museum News* inviting museum professionals to view a list of deaccessioned objects available for transfer in a password protected portion of their website (Historical Society of Olmstead County, 2010). However, this museum was unresponsive to three e-mail requests for information and is not included in this research.

In all, data was gathered from ten professionals representing nine museums as follows:

- Angela Stanford, Curator of Collections, Danish Immigrant Museum, IA
- Camille Hunt, Registrar, North Carolina Museum of History, NC
- Dan Harder, Museum Director, Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History, CA
- Frank Perry, Collections Consultant, Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History, CA
- Heather Coffman, Registrar, Grace Museum, TX
- Katherine Taylor-McBroom, Assistant Registrar, Shelburne Museum, VT
- Kristen Froehlich, Director of Collections, Philadelphia History Museum, PA
- Shana Hawrylchak, Collections Consultant, Hopkinton Historical Society, NH
- Tina Reuwsaat, Associate Curator of Collections, Southern Oregon Historical Society, OR
- Toni Kiser, Registrar, National WWII Museum, LA

Chapter 4: Results

Deaccession Policy Analysis

The document analysis includes information from eight deaccession policies; The Danish Immigrant Museum, the Hopkinton Historical Society, the Southern Oregon Historical Society, the Philadelphia History Museum, the North Carolina Museum of History, the National WWII Museum, the Grace Museum and the Shelburne Museum. The Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History was unable to provide a deaccession policy at this time due to their transition from public to private non-profit.

Seven (88%) of the museum policies make an affirmative statement about the use of deaccessioning as a tool for collections management. Although the Southern Oregon Historical Society did not include it within the policy itself, the introduction to the policy posted on their website states that deaccessioning allows them to “better care for the artifacts that are intrinsic

to our mission (Southern Oregon Historical Society).” The Danish Immigrant Museum policy states that the collections were, “never meant to be static,” deaccessioning is a “tool for the thoughtful application of a disciplined process of continual refinement to remove duplicate or damaged artifacts, as well as those that are no longer consistent with the Mission or have insufficient documentation. Such actions make available space, funds, and staff time to devote to the existing collections and new acquisitions (Danish Immigrant Museum, 2011).”

Table1: Policy criteria

Museum	Mission	Stability	Duplication	Hazard	Accession	Provenance
DIM	no longer consistent with mission	deteriorated and unable to care for object		hazard to staff or collection	not legally obtained	authenticity disproved
Grace	outside mission or scope of collection plan	beyond use or repair, No longer can care for object appropriately	duplication, better example acquired.	threat to health or safety		mistaken attribution, insignificant
HHS	unrelated to mission	unstable, prohibitive care costs	repetitive	safety hazard	illegally obtained	lacks original integrity
WWII	incompatible with mission	deteriorated, unable to provide proper care and storage	duplicates other items	may be harmful		failed to retain authenticity
NCMH	no longer relevant or useful	cannot preserve the artifact, deteriorated beyond use	ability to upgrade example	hazard		
PHM	outside of scope of collection	lacks physical integrity, cannot properly care for object	duplicate or redundant, better example acquired	threatens safety	obtained contrary to policy	lost historic value
Shelburne	no longer relevant and useful, not in collection policy	can no longer maintain and preserve, deteriorated beyond usefulness	duplication of inferior quality or provenance		inappropriately accessioned	superior provenance
SOHS	no longer relevant, useful in foreseeable future	unable to preserve object properly, deteriorated beyond usefulness	duplicate, better example available		no legal title	

Table 1 (page 35) reflects the criteria found in the policies and the specific language used to articulate them. Irrelevance to the museum's mission was the most consistently cited criteria, used in all eight (100%) of policies. Stability of the objects was also present in all eight (100%) policies. Duplication of material and the retention only of the best examples (either as determined by stability or provenance) is mentioned in seven (88%) of the policies. Provenance is articulated explicitly in four (50%) policies. However, the provenance of an artifact is cited as a way to make decisions regarding duplicate material in an additional two (25%) policies giving it significance as a criteria for this research as a standard for deaccessioning in six (75%) of the policies. For example, in the Hopkinton Historical Society policy, objects with "more detailed documentation," or "of greater historical value" will be retained while duplicates may be deaccessioned. In the case of duplication in the Shelburne Museum, the artifact with "superior" provenance will be retained and the other deaccessioned. At the Philadelphia History Museum, this is articulated as the fact that the object has "lost its historical value."

The potential hazard that the object could pose to staff or other collection material was cited in six (75%) policies, and the acquisition context was cited in five (63%) of the policies.

Table 2: Policy disposal

Museum	Transfer	Sale	Destruction	Best Interest
DIM	another institution	public auction	approved disposal	No
Grace	appropriate non-profit museum or educational institution	public advertised, third party auction	beyond repair, or fake or forgery	No
HHS	another museum; to Hopkinton non-profit	public auction	beyond repair	No
WWII	only to other educational institutions	public auction, sealed or invited bids; private party, at a price determined by independent appraisal	no value to the museum, and for which another home is unlikely to be found	Yes
NCMH	public institution	publically advertised auction	as a last resort	Yes
PHM	museum or educational institution	public auction	cannot be sold or transferred	No
Shelburne	more appropriate, not-for-profit institution	back to the previous owner at current fair market value, or public auction	extreme poor condition	No
SOHS	non-profit institution	public auction	hazard, or in such a deteriorated state to be of no value	Yes

Approved disposal methods are included in 100% of policies, and have been synthesized into three strategies for this research. The first is transfer to another public institution, indicating a method that prioritizes the public's continued access to the material. The second option is sale, which includes both auction and private sales, encompassing the possible removal of the object from the public domain to private collections. The final method identified in every policy is destruction. Five (63%) of the policies (Grace, WWII, Hopkinton Historical

Society, North Carolina Museum of History, and the Philadelphia History Museum) indicate a preferential order first for transfer, then sale, and lastly destruction. The remaining three policies do not indicate a preference. Three (38%) of the policies (Southern Oregon Historical Society, National WWII Museum, and North Carolina History Museum) indicate that final disposition of the object should serve the best interest of the museum. In eight (100%) of the policies destruction is linked to the object’s condition or authenticity as a prerequisite for use as a disposal method.

Table 3: Policy use of returns from deaccessioning

Museum	No Operations Expenses	Acquisitions only	General Collections Fund	Positive Statement
PHM	Yes		Yes	Yes
HHS	Yes		Yes	Yes
Shelburne		Yes		Yes
WWII			Yes	Yes
DIM	Yes	Yes		Yes
Grace	Yes		Yes	Yes
NCMH		Yes		Yes
SOHS			Yes	

Within eight (100%) of the policies submitted for this project, guidelines for the responsible use of funds generated by deaccession activity are included. The language used in the policies explicitly banned the use of funds from operations expenses, restricted them to acquisitions only, or assigned them to the collection fund for general collection expenses. In five (63%) of the museums, policies reserve deaccession funds for the general care of collections with statements such as use “for the purchase, care, or conservation of historic materials (National WWII Museum, Unknown).” Or, similarly, funds must “only be used for

acquisitions or direct care of collections (Hopkinton Historical Society, 2012).” The Philadelphia History Museum states that “no object shall be deaccessioned in order to provide financial support for institutional operations other than acquisition, conservation or direct care of collections (Philadelphia History Museum, 2002).” The three (37%) remaining museums restrict funds only to the purchase of new acquisitions as reflected in statements such as “all proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned objects will be deposited in the Acquisitions Fund. This fund is available for the purchase of acquisitions for the permanent collection (Shelburne Museum, Unknown).” Similarly, the Danish Immigrant Museum policy states these funds “will only be used only to acquire new artifacts for the collection (Danish Immigrant Museum, 2011).” Restrictions in four (50%) of the museum policies specify that funds are not to be used for any operating expenses in language similar to the Grace Museum’s policy assertion that “such funds may not be used to defray ongoing operation expenses (The Grace Museum, Unknown).”

Interview Analysis

Qualitative information collected from ten semi-structured interviews of nine museums is represented in tables 4-10. The first prompt requested information regarding the instigating context and motivations for the museum’s deaccession project.

Table 4: Motivation for deaccession projects

Museum	Reasons for deaccession projects
PHM	Alleviate storage space for costume collection
HHS	Storage space and long term preservation needs of textile collection, collection inventory and refinement
Shelburne	Alleviate storage space by weeding out any unnecessary, unstable material in costume collection
WWII	Refine collection, identify areas of under and over representation
DIM	Part of an overall collection review to document collection, space
Grace	Addressing ethically questionable accessions, inventory collection
NCMH	Elimination of 3,000 square foot off off-site storage
SOHS	Loss of 100% of funding, remove any irrelevant material
SCMNH	Shift from public to private non-profit, elimination of 5,000 square foot storage space

The first prompt asked participants for the motivation or catalyst for the deaccession project. Imperatives of physical space limitations for the collection precipitated deaccessioning activity in five (67%) of the museums. Three (36%) of those are alleviating cramped conditions to allow for better preservation in current storage facilities. The museums phrased the need to free up storage spaces in several ways such as “storage options are limited & cramping is causing its own preservation issues. A recent leak in the basement has caused the latest to push to find better storage solutions and reduce the number of inappropriate objects in the collection (Hawrylchak, 2012).” Similarly, “space is a real premium for us and to continue to provide the climate and staff support for objects that are not supporting our mission is not a responsible use of our resources (Froehlich, 2012).” Storage space is being eliminated completely in two (33%) of the museums. At the North Carolina Museum of History, budget cuts did not allow them to renew the lease on all of their off-site storage facilities and so they

chose to vacate the space with “no temperature or humidity control and did not allow for appropriate care of the collection (Hunt, 2012).” At the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History, the collection of historic objects has remained in storage for the last 40 years and as a part of transferring the management to the private non-profit the state has asked that the space be vacated (Harder, 2012).

Collection refinement through the removal of objects that are not furthering the museums mission was noted by seven (78%) of the museums as a reason to begin deaccessioning. As stated by a representative of the Hopkinton Historical Society, the project was a way to “identify and weed out too much of certain things so that they can grow in other areas that they identify (Hawrylchak, 2012).” At the National WWII Museum, they are removing previous acquisitions of un-provenanced objects that had been used to fill exhibition needs. They now have a better provenanced collection, contributing to their goal of having every object tell a story (Kiser, 2012). The need to document the collection and gain greater intellectual and physical control of the material was noted as a reason for deaccession projects in five, (56%) of the museums to “gain more information about the most important pieces in our collection (Taylor-McBroom, 2012),” or assess areas of over and under representation (Kiser, 2012). The Danish Immigrant Museum and the Hopkinton Historical Society are both deaccessioning as a part of an inventory and documentation process.

Table 5: Practice deaccession criteria

Museum	Unethical	Irrelevant to mission	Provenance	Stability	Duplicate	Potential revenue
DIM		X		X	X	
Grace	X	X	X			
HHS		X			X	
WWII		X	X		X	
NCMH		X	X	X		
PHM		X	X		X	
Shelburne		X		X	X	
SOHS		X		X		X
SCMNH		X	X	X		

The second prompt in the interviews asked for information about the criteria that the museums reported relying on most as a justification for deaccessioning objects. The top three criteria used by each museum are noted in table 5.

As shown in table 5, relevance to mission was the most consistent criteria used in nine (100%) of the museums. As stated by the Grace Museum, “mission drives deaccessioning to shape the collection into what they want it to be (Coffman, 2012).” Similarly, objects must be “useful for our exhibition or research mission (Stanford, 2012).” At the National WWII Museum, the representative explained that, objects in the collection must be explicitly *from*, not simply *about*, WWII or they can be deaccessioned (Kiser, 2012).

The stability of the object was a top three consideration in five (56%) of the museums. At the North Carolina Museum of History, they made the decision to “focus on artifacts that were in poor condition first, and then look at secondary criterion (Hunt, 2012).” At the Shelburne Museum, it was stated that “the costumes that were in the roughest shape (Taylor-McBroom, 2012).”

Duplication was cited in four (44%) of the institutions. The Danish Immigrant Museum was deciding how many representations of an object they need and then only keeping those with the best provenance (Stanford, 2012).

The specific provenance of the piece was also a top criteria for five (56%) of the museums. The North Carolina Museum of History indicated that there was no record of why much of the material in the storage space they vacated was brought into the collection in the first place (Hunt, 2012). The Grace Museum was actively using an analysis of the acquisition conditions as a determining factor for deaccessioning due to the fact that there is some question about the ethics of the tax deductions taken by several donors in the past (Coffman, 2012).

The Southern Oregon Historical Society was using the potential revenue from the sale of an object as a part of assessment for deaccession; a criterion not found in any policy.

Table 6: Practice disposal methods

Museum	Transfer/ Exchange	Sale	Destroy	Justification
DIM	2	1	3	takes too long to transfer objects, time and staff prohibitive.
Grace	2	1	3	takes too long to transfer objects, no museum wants them.
HHS	NA	NA	NA	NA
WWII	1	2	3	respect the story of the object by keeping it in a museum
NCMH	2	1	3	most material was fairly deteriorated, no museum wants it
PHM	2	1	3	determined by provenance and value, high value objects sold in best interest of the collection
Shelburne	2	1	3	main concern is space, no museum wants the material
SOHS	2	1	3	determined by value
SCMNH	NA	NA	NA	Determined by appropriateness of location

The third prompt asked participants about disposal methods that were used most often. Seven of the nine (78%) participating museums have reached the point in their deaccession project in which they have physically disposed of objects. Of these seven, six (85%) indicated that sale is the method of disposal that they use the most frequently. The Danish Immigrant Museum disposes of material to antique dealers by offering groups of similar material to several and selling it to the dealer with the highest offer (Stanford, 2012). The Philadelphia History Museum representative expressed that the “preference is public auction because of a responsibility to the institution to not give away items otherwise you are robbing the coffers of the collections fund (Froehlich, 2012).” The Shelburne and Philadelphia History Museums

indicated that they sell most of the objects because they realize that they will not be likely to find another museum willing to take the material (Taylor-McBroom, 2012) (Froehlich, 2012).

The National WWII Museum was the only museum (11%) whose representative indicated that they transferred most of the deaccessioned material, only selling objects that do not have evidence of a donation history indicating that they were purchased (Kiser, 2012).

Table 7: Practice challenges in deaccessioning

Museum	Emotional Attachment	Transfer	Time/Staff Resources	Inadequate Documentation
PHM	Yes		Yes	
HHS			Yes	Yes
Shelburne			Yes	
WWII	Yes			
DIM		Yes	Yes	
Grace		Yes	Yes	Yes
NCMH	Yes	Yes	Yes	
SOHS	Yes			Yes
SCMNH		Yes		

The fourth prompt asked for the participant to discuss the challenges encountered during deaccessioning. The responses are represented in Table 7: emotional attachment to the collection, inadequate documentation, finding institutions to transfer objects to, and the lack of staff time to devote to the project.

Emotional investment of the staff in the collection was reported as a challenge in four of the nine museums (44%). As indicated by the Philadelphia History Museum representative, “we are in this field because we want to collect, preserve and interpret. Sometimes it’s heart wrenching to see something go. There are times when it is a very difficult thing but there is ultimately a decision and it might not necessarily follow your recommendation, but it is a

process (Froehlich, 2012).” At the North Carolina Museum of History it was hard to get curators to agree to let things go because they felt that they had “failed the object (Hunt, 2012).” At the Southern Oregon Historical Society, the deaccession project was undertaken “with great reluctance and everyone considers it a shame that we were forced to do so. We would have preferred to retain the entire collection, regardless of provenance and we feel our collection has been diminished as a result (Reuwsaat, 2012).”

It was also noted that the challenges associated with finding new homes and the feeling of obligation to find an appropriate museum to accept the object was a challenge in four (44%) museums.

Six (67%) of the museums found that staff time limited the ability to deaccession. The limited size of the staff was noted by the Hopkinton Historical Society and the Grace Museum as reasons that deaccessioning had not been addressed prior to the current project, and that they still have extremely limited time to devote to the practice. At the Danish Immigrant Museum the representative indicated that the reliance on volunteers to make recommendations for deaccessioning material during the inventory created inconsistencies, and at the Shelburne Museum, the representative spent two years on the costume deaccession project which she felt was too long (Taylor-McBroom, 2012).

Finally, reconciling documentation for found-in-collections objects was noted as a challenge in three (33%) of the participating museums.

Table 8: Deaccession resources consulted

Museum	Museum Studies Degree	Experience	Third Party Evaluators	AAM	Professional Discussion Forums	Policy
SCMNH		Yes			Yes	
PHM		Yes	Yes			Yes
HHS	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes
Shelburne	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes
WWII	Yes					Yes
DIM	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes
Grace	Yes				Yes	Yes
NCHM	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes
SOHS		Yes				Yes

The fifth prompt was for the resources that the museums consulted prior to deaccessioning. Responses indicated that there was reliance on staff with museum studies degrees, experience, third party evaluators, AAM publications, professional discussion forums, and the institution's own policy. It was noted that six (67%) of the museums rely on staff with a Master's of Museum Studies and the training that was a part of this education. The past deaccession experience of the staff involved was indicated by four (44%) museums. The use of third party evaluation for things like condition and authenticity was used by two (22%) museums. The AAM publications were used by three (33%) museums. Six (67%) museums used discussion forums and online networks.

Confidence in established policy as a resource was cited by staff from eight (89%) museums. One policy was revised as in 2011 (Danish Immigrant Museum, 2011). One policy was a draft currently under review (Hopkinton Historical Society, 2012). One policy was revised in 2002 to help cull the acquisition of large collection from a historical society that closed (Froehlich, 2012). Three (33%) policies were revised in preparation for the anticipated

implementation of active deaccession projects (Hawrylchak, 2012) (Kiser, 2012) (Stanford, 2012). Four (44%) of the museums did not revise their collections policies for deaccessions.

Table 9. Deaccession returns

Museum	Collections care	Acquisitions	Staff Salary	Good Will
PHM	Yes	Yes		Yes
HHS	Yes			
Shelburne	Yes			
WWII	Yes			
DIM	Yes	Yes		
Grace		Yes		Yes
NCMH		Yes		Yes
SOHS	Yes		Yes	
SCMNH				Yes

The sixth prompt was for the use of deaccession funds. The interviewees reported that the returns resulting from the deaccession projects are benefiting the museums in several ways. Represented in Table 9, these benefits included collections care in six (67%), purchase of new acquisitions in four (44%), ability to pay staff in one (11%). Four (44%) museum's representatives indicated that positive relationships developed with other museums and the public in return for transferring artifacts was a benefit of note.

Table 10: Public responses to deaccessioning

Museum	Public Disclosure	Perceived Public Response	How the Museum Responds
SCMNH	News media	Positive	Educate about the value of the process
PHM	News media	Negative	Refer to policy
HHS	No	Negative	Refer to policy
Shelburne	No	Negative	Refer to policy
WWII	No	Negative	Refer to policy
DIM	No	Negative	Refer to policy
Grace	No	Negative	Use policy to educate
NCMH	No	Positive	Use policy to educate
SOHS	News media, museum's website	Negative	Use policy to educate

The seventh prompt requested information about the way museums handle communication with the public about deaccessioning. Table 10 represents the representatives' responses. Six (67%) of the museums chose not to make their deaccession activities public. Two (22%) museums deaccession activities were made public by media sources. One (11%) museum has had media coverage of the deaccession project in the local paper, and has published a list of deaccession material on their website (Reuwsaat, 2012).

Seven (78%) of the representatives indicated that they feel that there is a generally negative perception of deaccessioning by the public. At the Shelburne Museum, due to negative feedback from previous "highly publicized deaccessioning of Manets and Degas, we don't aggressively publicize our deaccessions; however, we are transparent and disclose any and all information regarding deaccessions (Taylor-McBroom, 2012)." It was noted by the representative from the Grace Museum that deaccessioning can be "based on politics and relationships. We can't burn the bridges from the people who feed us; we get grants from a large donor family prominent in the community (Coffman, 2012)." She further stated that

“people are really scared of it people treat it as a bad word but if you do it responsibly there is nothing to fear (Coffman, 2012).” All nine (100%) of the museums indicated that they will disclose deaccession activity on request. Eight (89%) use policy to explain their ability to deaccession and the decisions that they make when deaccessions occur.

Chapter 5: Discussion

From these data results several trends emerge within this particular set of museums. The ideal list of criteria found in policy seems to be largely consistent with the criteria used in practice. Second, the policy recommendations for disposal methods seem to be opposite of the actual disposal practices used. Finally, although policy seems to indicate that a single criterion is used to deaccession an artifact, the assessment of object based on multiple criteria seem to be employed by the museums in practice.

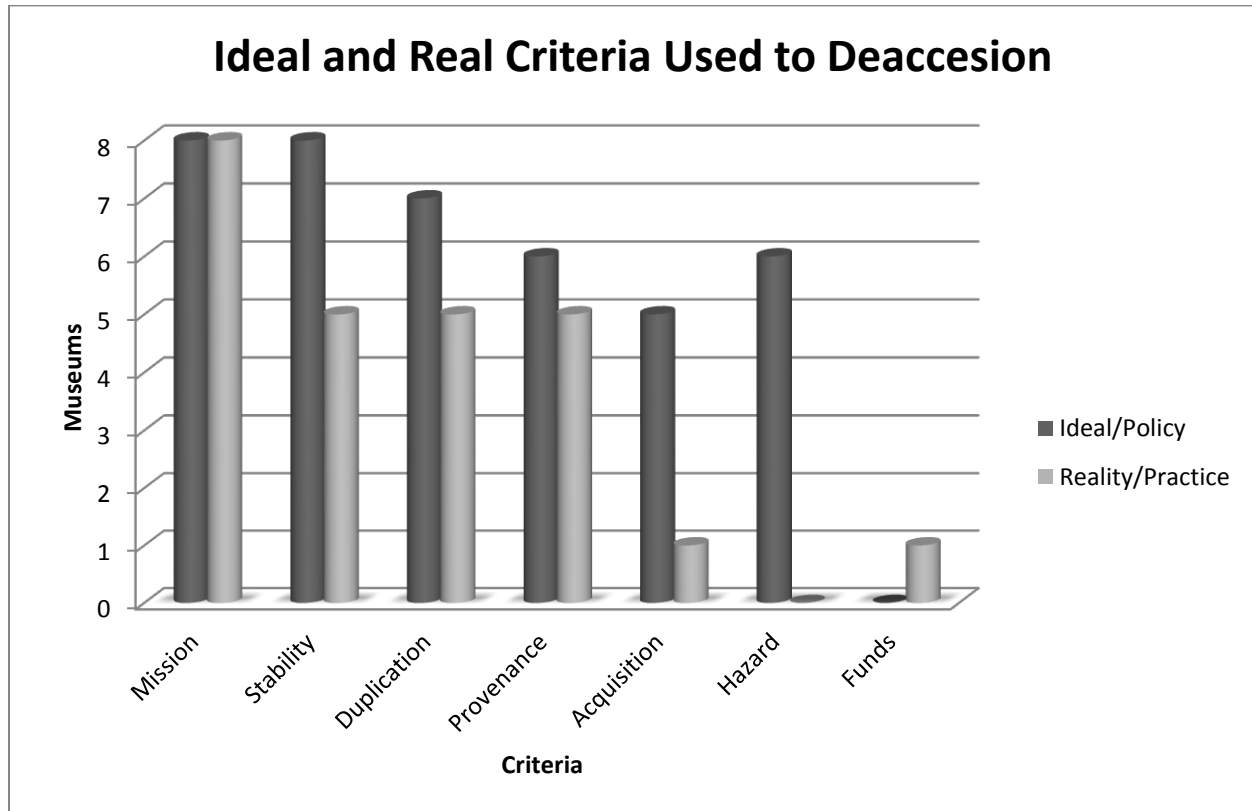


Figure 1: Comparison of deaccession criteria in policy and practice

As shown in figure 1, the criteria that are seemingly cited in both policy and practice most consistently is mission (100% of the time). Regardless of the other criteria, museums seem to believe as the representative of the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History does, that “collecting is all about mission (Harder, 2012).” The Grace Museum similarly stated that deaccessioning is a way to create storage space and make collections useable, but regardless of these benefits, “mission drives deaccessioning (Coffman, 2012).” The Danish Immigrant Museum’s representative discussed utility of the collection in terms of application to the mission. Similarly, at the Philadelphia Museum of History, “the majority of items deaccessioned recently are based on their provenance as it pertains to our mission. In other words if it does not represent local history we consider deaccessioning it (Reuwsaat, 2012).”

In 100% of policies, the stability of an object was also a criteria for deaccessioning. In practice this was expressed as a priority in five (63%) of the museums. Stability seemed to be a priority when the deaccession project involved alleviating storage space to allow better preservation. The North Carolina Museum of History chose to abandon its lease on the least stable environment for collections storage and deaccession as much of that material as possible.

The duplication of an object in the collection is mentioned in seven (88%) of policies, and was mentioned as a top criterion in the projects of five (63%) of the museums. Similar to stability, it seems that the identification of areas of duplication was dependent on the goals of the project. The use of the term “better examples” was iterated by the representatives of the National WWII Museum and the Shelburne Museum. The National WWII Museum in particular mentioned that the assessment of the depth of representation of a material type was linked to the degree of provenance of the artifacts in the collection (Kiser, 2012). The Philadelphia History Museum representative mentioned that there was a significant amount of duplication in other material types, such as ephemera (Froehlich, 2012). Similarly, although it was not a large consideration in the project discussed for this research, the North Carolina Museum of History indicated that they would like to look into a collection of bottles in the collection due to the fact that it is known to contain a significant amount of duplication and its refinement could generate resources for the remaining collection (Hunt, 2012).

Other than mission relevance, provenance seems to be where the greatest overlap for policy and practice criteria was found in these museums. The provenance of an object featured heavily in six (75%) of deaccession policies, and in five (63%) of deaccession practices. As stated

by the representative from North Carolina Museum of History most of the objects in the space that was vacated were “without documentation of why they were brought into the collection in the first place (Hunt, 2012).” Similarly, “it is easier to defend deaccessioning things that do not have a story (Stanford, 2012).” “Without evidence of thoughtful giving it is easier to deaccession (Coffman, 2012).”

The remaining criteria, acquisition context and the potentially hazardous nature of the artifact, which featured heavily in policy with five (56%) and six (67%) respectively using them, were not heavily used in the projects discussed. The Grace Museum’s staff’s recognition of an unethical accession catalyzed their project, which is the only one (11%) using this criteria prominently in their practices. Another anomaly is the appearance of raising funds as a reason to deaccession an artifact in one museum’s (11%) practice given the fact that it is not found in any ideal policy.

Within the policies criteria for deaccessions were stated as singular consideration as mentioned in the collection policy of the Philadelphia History Museum that an object “may be considered for deaccessioning for one or more of the following reasons (Philadelphia History Museum, 2002).” However, it is also noted as in the Danish Immigrant Museum’s policy, that “artifacts that meet one or more of these criteria, or similar to above, may still be retained in the collection (Danish Immigrant Museum, 2011).” This seems to recognize that although policy guides deaccessioning there will always be the need for connoisseurship in the evaluation of artifacts. The Philadelphia History Museum stated that “we are all in this field because we want to collect preserve and interpret and sometimes its heart wrenching to see something go. There are times when it is a very difficult thing, but there is ultimately a decision. It might not

necessarily follow your recommendation, but it is a process (Froehlich, 2012).” It was noted by others that it is important to try and take emotion out of deaccessioning to make the most objective decisions that best serve the museum in the long run (Hunt, 2012). As noted by the representative from the North Carolina Museum of History, it is important to take the emotion out of deaccessioning, because it can be difficult to let things go, although it is easier to deaccession things based on their lack of documentation supporting its presence in the collection (Hunt, 2012). Similarly echoed as the fact that it is “easier to justify deaccessioning something without evidence of thoughtful giving (Coffman, 2012),” or that is not in suitable condition for use in the museum (Froehlich, 2012).

The assessment of objects based on multiple criteria is evidence in some of the interviews. At the Southern Oregon Historical Society, decisions were “based on their provenance as it pertains to our mission (Reuwsaat, 2012).”

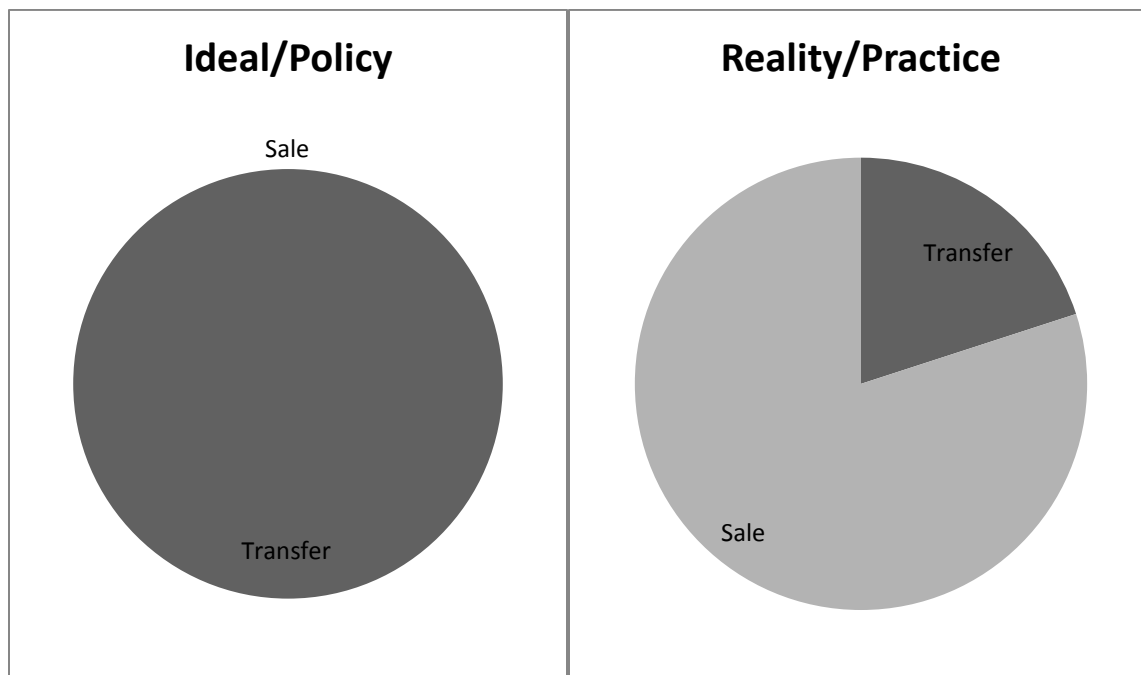


Figure 2: Comparison of disposal methods in policy and practice

Comparing the ideal disposal methods with those practiced in reality seems to show a departure from ideals as articulated in policy. Of the five (63%) policies which articulate a preference for disposal first through transfer, then sale, and lastly disposal (The Grace Museum, The National WWII Museum, Hopkinton Historical Society, the North Carolina Museum of History, and the Philadelphia History Museum), only the National WWII Museum has successfully accomplished this for the majority of its deaccessioned material.

Destruction was not reported as a prevalent method of disposal in practice, although it does demonstrate the closest ties to the stability of the object in both policy and practice. At the Southern Oregon Historical Society, destruction was only used for artifacts “in rare circumstances when hazardous or in too poor of condition to be of any use whatsoever (Reuwsaat, 2012).” In policy it is noted similarly that disposal of artifacts through destructions should be used if the object is “a threat to human safety, has deteriorated beyond repair (The Grace Museum, Unknown),” or its condition is “is too poor for resale (North Carolina Division of State History Museums, 2008).” The use of destruction as a last resort only after having attempted to transfer or sell the object was noted by the Danish Immigrant Museum, “whatever would not transfer is sold – but if it’s in really bad shape, we will just discard (Stanford, 2012).”

The ideal policy preference for transferring was reflected in the preference of several of the museums’ staff that participated in interviews. The Danish Immigrant Museum staff spent two years rewriting their policy prior to deaccessioning in a process that was described as “giving birth to an elephant (Stanford, 2012).” They did this to ensure they were going about it legally and ethically, since even the illusion of unethical practice causes damage with donors

and museum community that can get a museum in a lot of trouble (Stanford, 2012). In reality, however the challenges associated with the practice of transferring objects was preventing them from adherence to this ideal. The representative reflected that although their “first goal is to try to transfer objects if in a reasonable amount of time – sure we could find homes for everything we deaccession but too much time that would be better used to complete the inventory (Stanford, 2012).” The Grace Museum’s representative reflected that “this stuff was trusted to us we want to be sure that at least it goes someplace where people can use them.” Unfortunately, she is discovering “that transferring is so much harder than selling – can’t give away most of it away because other museums have the same types of standards about the type of stuff that they accession that we use to deaccession the artifact (Coffman, 2012).” The representative from the North Carolina Museum of History stated that “good faith efforts were made to find new homes. Curators familiar with artifacts are also familiar with other museums which may be interested in them and let their contacts know. We felt bad when no one wanted the artifacts for getting it out of public accessibility sending it to auction (Hunt, 2012).” The Southern Oregon Historical Society linked their sales by auction to the expediency; “all selected items were sent to auction, rather than be sold to other non-profits in the interest of minimum investment of staff time and maximum sale price on the open market (Reuwsaat, 2012).”

The Danish Immigrant Museum’s representative intoned that for artifacts that lack substantial provenance or good condition, they do not even attempt to transfer. They simply sell these things. In extreme cases, they are destroyed (Stanford, 2012). The North Carolina Museum of History indicated they found it particularly rewarding when they were able to transfer a nuclear reactor panel to a more relevant location and it was put on exhibit for the

public's enjoyment immediately (Hunt, 2012). At the Philadelphia History Museum, several large millstones were deaccessioned that were not germane to their mission and took up a great deal of space. Despite their usual preference for selling artifacts at auction to raise money for the collection fund, the strong local provenance of the millstones caused the staff to feel that although it would be more expedient to dispose of them at auction, they "didn't want to see them end up in some one's garden (Froehlich, 2012)." Despite the logistical difficulties and lack of financial return associated with moving the millstones, the museum transferred them to a more appropriate local intuition (Froehlich, 2012).

The relationships that are built with other museums as well as the good press that can precipitate from transferring an object of significance to a more appropriate institution where it is used in programming was a benefit equitable to obtaining funds for a new object (Hunt, 2012). As with the millstones, it was shown that the rewarding aspect of the transfer may outweigh the usual preference for the expediency of selling artifacts at auction. Finally, transfer it also adds value to the object when it is placed in a more appropriate collection where the public might expect to find and enjoy it (Harder, 2012).

The Grace Museum's representative articulated that the commodity status of an art collection is more desirable, whereas the low monetary value of history collections objects makes it "almost impossible" to transfer (Coffman, 2012). On the other hand, the Philadelphia History Museum representative stated that, in practice, transferring can be considered discourteous to colleagues as an attempt to saddle them with deaccessioned material that is often un-provenanced, in poor condition, or redundant (Froehlich, 2012). Additionally, she believed that not selling objects of value was "the equivalent of robbing the coffers of the

collection fund (Froehlich, 2012).” Similarly, the representative from the Shelburne Museum stated that “we find costumes are really hard to unload to another museum because storing them takes up quite a bit of space, we just send them to auction (Taylor-McBroom, 2012).” Although they feel that they are “failing the objects (Hunt, 2012)” when they are put up for sale, this was the way that they disposed of most of the deaccessioned material. At the North Carolina Museum of History, identifying institutions that will be able to provide stable and appreciative environments for the objects was noted as a challenge, and was echoed by the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History, which did not want to see the objects go to institutions that were unable to provide sufficient preservation (Perry, 2012). The Danish Immigrant Museum representative reflected that although the first goal is to transfer everything that they deaccession in a reasonable amount of time, it simply takes too much time (Stanford, 2012). A restriction on staff time and resources to deaccession given the prioritization of the collection that is already in use seems to have created a preference for disposing of objects through third party sales (Coffman, 2012). “Selected items were sent to auction, rather than be sold to other non-profits in the interest of minimum investment of staff time and maximum sale price on the open market (Reuwsaat, 2012).” The Hopkinton Historical Society representative likewise indicated the desire to handle deaccessioned material in lots rather than individually since it is more time and cost effective to do so when dealing with objects of low monetary value that are not likely to bring in substantial funds (Hawrylchak, 2012).

Several museum representatives directly linked the methods of disposal to the justification used to deaccession the object. The Shelburne Museum representative linked the poor condition of the costume collection deaccessions directly to their disposal: “most of our

pieces were in such bad shape no other museum would want them. They were sent to auction mostly (Taylor-McBroom, 2012).” Linking the associated provenance with the disposal method for material, the National WW II Museum representative indicated that even though the museum transferred most of the material that they deaccessioned, they do this because the artifacts have a provenance that represents a personal story. These stories are transferred with the artifact to maintain their intellectual integrity and respect the personal story associated with it. Although this is applicable for most of their deaccessioned objects since they are deaccessioning material that is simply out of the scope of their collection at this time, they do sell the artifacts which are not supported by a unique provenance (Kiser, 2012).

The criteria found in the policies and practices of these museums seem to correlate. The representation of criteria found in policy for mission, stability, provenance, and duplication follow the same trends in policy and practice. The practical application of ideal disposal methods however, is not consistent in this sample of museums. This has been attributed by the museums’ representatives to concerns for efficiency and the condition or significance of the object that is being deaccessioned.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Taken together these results seem to indicate that the ideals represented in policy to transfer deaccessioned artifacts is not always carried through in practice. Due to constraints on staff time and obligations to the core collection disposal methods chosen in practice rely heavily on a multifaceted assessment of an artifacts value. These assessments are determined by criteria found in policy, especially provenance and stability. Artifacts that are not mission

relevant, but which possess strong documentation, or are in good condition, are transferred. Objects found lacking in either or both are often disposed of through sale. The connection between the criteria for deaccession and disposal method is articulated clearly when the disposal method is destruction; however there is opportunity to make the connections between transfers and sales, and the criteria that make these options appropriate more explicit to ensure accountability when disposing of deaccessioned artifacts.

The links between the evaluations of deaccession criteria for choosing the disposal method saves the museum staff time and resources. It can make disposal decisions clearer and help to remove some of the subjectivity from the process. It can also ensure that objects with significant provenance remain accessible to the public in a more appropriate institution.

It has been suggested that a part of the “reason that the ideal and the real are so far apart in the museum world is that we assume - incorrectly - that our collections are going to last forever. In claiming to provide preservation in perpetuity we are faced with the problem of defining 'perpetual (Washburn, 1984, p. 5)’” If this is true, than deaccessioning policies which help to shape a collection as a part of farsighted, responsible collections management are seemingly an important aspect of bringing the two closer together.

Limitations

This research had three limitations. The first limitation is the small sample size used to gather information. The museums represented here are also working on a variety of deaccession projects with different motivating contexts which can affect the criteria that they are using and so the results are highly specified to their unique situations and cannot be readily generalized to the larger field of history museums. The second is that the data came exclusively

from policy and staff accounts of deaccessioning. This did not include factors such as boards, influential donors, or other components of governance structure that may have an influence on deaccession practices. It was also beyond the scope of this research to address the paper trail associated with deaccessions. The implications of NAGPRA, or other tax laws and regulatory forces that may affect the museums legal ability to deaccession were also beyond the scope of this research. Finally, the staff members whom participated in the interviews represent several different positions within the museum staff structure including registrars, collections managers, curators, executive directors and consultants, or some combination of these roles which may affect their perception of the deaccession projects, as could the size of the collections staff as a whole.

Recommendations

The research into the alignment of deaccession policy and practice could be advanced through the use of a larger sample size with a more structured tool such as a survey for collecting information about practices. The sample of participants may also be refined for the collection size, or the participating staff members' position or their role in the deaccession project. Refining the selection of museums based upon the motivation for deaccessioning may advance an understanding of the most applicable criteria and patterns in the weight which they are given when choosing a disposal method. Finally, the motivations for using sale as a disposal method in practice should be researched to determine ways that it is limited or facilitated. Further research into these areas could help determine the best ways to bring policy and practice, the ideal and real, closer together for collections management.

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Appendix A: Museum Profiles

North Carolina Museum of History (NCMH), Raleigh, North Carolina

Opened to the public December 5, 1902, the museum has 140,000 artifacts representing six centuries. Their mission is to collect and preserve artifacts “and other historical materials relating to the history and heritage of North Carolina in a local, regional, national, and international context to assist people in understanding how the past influences the present.

The Division interprets the state’s history through exhibitions, educational programs, and publications available to the visitor on-site or through distance-learning technologies.”

Deaccessioning became a priority for the museum when budget cuts did not allow them to renew the lease on a 3,000 square foot remote storage space. The space was home to large farm equipment, architectural elements and appliances with no environmental controls.

Although not actively deteriorating at an appreciable rate, the material was not in good condition to begin with and the collection housed here was reviewed for considerations of condition and mission to ensure that the important objects were transferred to more appropriate storage and the rest was deaccessioned in order to alleviate pressure of the museum's resources.

Danish Immigrant Museum (DIM), Elk Horn, Iowa

Opened to the public June, 1994, the collection began in 1985 and now numbers approximately 35,000 artifacts. With a mission to celebrate Danish roots and American Dreams the Danish immigrant museum continues to collect material from Danish American heritage. Actively engaged in deaccessioning since 2010 through an ongoing project with the intention of refining

their collection as a part of an overall inventory, cataloging and digitization program, the Danish Immigrant museum relies on the inventory volunteers to recognize and recommend objects as they are encountered for deaccession. Thus far the textile collection has received the most attention and approximately a quarter of the collection has been deaccessioned due to concerns of condition and provenance.

Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont

Opened to the public in 1947, the Shelburne museum seeks to enrich people's lives through art, history, and culture. Their mission is to broaden the audience engage their curiosity and give them an extraordinary museum experience. In the mid 1990's the museum received notoriety with the controversial deaccessioning of several Manet and Degas paintings. With a collection of approximately 150,000 artifacts their recent deaccessioning has centered on their costume collection, which they hired a consultant to review with the goal of removing unnecessary garments that were taking up storage space, or degraded and to gain more information about the important pieces in their collection. The project took approximately two years.

National WWII Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana

Opened to the public June 6, 2000, the museum tells the story of the American Experience in *the war that changed the world* — why it was fought, how it was won, and what it means today — so that all generations will understand the price of freedom and be inspired by what they learn. There are approximately 140,000 artifacts in the collection, The museum has only begun deaccessioning in 2009, and a total of 28 objects have been deaccessioned so far as a way to introduce the board to the process. The growth of the museum and its staff have come to the point that can facilitate deaccession activities and they feel confident enough in the collection

to evaluate the areas in which it is overrepresented and where there may be holes in order to inform future acquisition decisions and ensure that all objects in the relate to a personal story.

Hopkinton Historical Society (HHS), Hopkinton, New Hampshire

The society has undergone three mission shifts since it was founded in 1859 as a literary discussion group. Currently the mission states that it is their purpose to investigate, collect, preserve, and communicate whatever may relate to the history of the Town of Hopkinton and its people...shall collect, catalog, maintain, interpret, and make available to the public such...materials as may serve to document or illuminate the town's history. The museum operates out of a historic building with less than ideal environmental controls and a shortage of appropriate storage space has become a driving force for refining the collection. Recognizing the susceptibility of the textile collection, the museum targeted this material for refinement and stabilization. From a total collection of 5,000 objects the textiles number 1113 pieces. The museum completed an inventory of textiles began in late 2011, and is now reviewing objects in the context of the entire textile collection for duplication and condition to make deaccession recommendations.

Grace Museum, Abilene, Texas

Opened in a historic hotel originally built in 1909, in the Grace museum opened in the 1930's as a home to both a fine art and history collections, which it uses to serve its mission of building connections through new experiences in art, science and history within the evolving Texas story through exhibitions, programs and collections. Since the hiring of collection staff which the museum lacked from 2007-2010, deaccession imperatives have emerged including questionable acquisitions and a list of over 2,000 artifacts found in a drawer board approved for

deaccession in 2004 that have not been disposed of. The museum is making an effort to address these concerns to and inventory the collection to make it accessible and balance. The challenge has been to balance the resources between the history collection and the art collection which is better documented and utilized in rotating exhibits whereas the historic exhibits are static.

Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History (SCMNH), Santa Cruz, California

Opened as the first public museum in Santa Cruz in 1905, the collection was turned over to the city for management in the 1920's and due to budget cuts, to avoid closing in 2009; the city has transferred the management of the museum to their non-profit partner, The Santa Cruz Museum Association. The mission of the Natural History Museum non-profit does not extend to historical collections beyond their potential to inform natural history collecting from the area. State has asked the non-profit to evaluate the history collection for retention. Prompting the museum to hire a local historian who has worked with the museum since the 1970's to inventory and catalog the 3,600 piece artifact collection which has remained in storage for the last 40 years. Through this inventory 2,000 pieces have been recommended for deaccession and the museum is in the process of determining the best disposition for the objects.

Philadelphia History Museum (PHM), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The acquisition of a historic society collection in 2002 which put the museum's artifact collection over 100,000 objects created a need for the museum to prioritize storage space and re-assess its mission. The museum has been deaccessioning from its history and art collections for several years and disposing of the objects through public auction. The most recent project was the review of the costumes collection to maximize storage space and maintenance of the

mission relevant objects. The museum uses two third-party evaluators to evaluate the collection for content and value to ensure that they are making the most objective decisions. The publicity of the deaccessioning has focused on the auctioning of high value art works, although noting that they have also auctioned low value objects opening discussions about the differences in deaccessioning historic and art collections.

Southern Oregon Historical Society (SOHS), Medford, Oregon

Since 1946 the SOHS has been preserving history Jacksonville County Oregon and encompasses a historic farm, almost one million artifacts, and a research library. A 100% cut in state funding for the institution forced the museum to lay off 99% of its staff and close its facilities. With significant reorganization and reliance on volunteers they have been able to reopen the research library with an area reserved for small exhibits, re-hire a small collections staff, start a traveling community exhibits program, maintain the storage facility and carry out limited maintenance on the historic property. The museum has been deaccessioning publically with the goal of selling objects at auction to raise funds to maintain the collection through these budget cuts, including paying for collection staff salaries.

Appendix B: Deaccession Policies of Participating Museums

Appendix B contains the deaccession policies for the following institutions:

- The Danish Museum
- The Grace Museum
- The Hopkinton Historical Society
- The National WWII Museum
- The North Carolina Museum of History
- The Philadelphia History Museum
- The Shelburne Museum
- The Southern Oregon Historical Society

4. Deaccessioning

4.1 DEACCESSIONING OVERVIEW

The Danish Immigrant Museum's permanent and UER collections are never intended to be static. The Museum is committed to continually strengthening the collections. One of the most important ways to do this is by thoughtful application of a disciplined process of continual refinement to remove duplicate or damaged artifacts, as well as those that are no longer consistent with the Mission or have insufficient documentation. Such actions make available space, funds, and staff time to devote to the existing collections and new acquisitions.

The deaccessioning process will follow all legal requirements and professional standards. No artifact may be removed from the collections without going through the accepted deaccessioning process detailed in this Policy. The deaccessioning process for permanent collection artifacts is different than that for UER artifacts.

Briefly, the deaccessioning process for all artifacts begins with a specific recommendation from the professional staff and approval by Collections Review Committee (CRC). Following this, actions to effect deaccessioning may be initiated for UER artifacts. Permanent collection artifacts require further approval by the Collections Strategy and Policy Committee (CSPC), and finally approval by the Board of Directors. Only when Board approval is obtained are the actions to effect deaccessioning initiated. If the recommendation to deaccession an artifact in either collection is denied by the CRC, the artifact is retained in its collection. If a permanent collection artifact's recommendation is denied by the CSPC or the Board, the artifact is retained in its collection.

An artifact may be removed from either of the collections if specific criteria are met. These include the following: 1) it has been proven that the artifact did not belong to the donor at the time of donation; 2) the artifact is no longer consistent with the Mission of the Museum; 3) the authenticity of the artifact has been disproved; 4) the artifact has deteriorated beyond usefulness or the ability of the Museum to care for it; and 5) the artifact presents a potential hazard risk to other artifacts in the collections and/or to people. Artifacts that meet one or more of these criteria, or similar to above, may still be retained in its collection.

Artifacts that have been formally deaccessioned may be disposed of in one of the following ways: 1) through transfer to the alternate collection (e.g. permanent to UER or vice versa) or to the Family History and Genealogy Center; 2) through transfer to another institution; or 3) through approved disposal or public auction.

Deaccessioned artifacts will not be returned to the original donors. No one associated directly with the Museum may obtain deaccessioned artifacts regardless of type of disposition except through public sale. All monies from sales will be used for the acquisition of new artifacts.

4.2 DEACCESSIONING PROCESS

Complete procedures and forms for deaccessioning artifacts are documented in the Collections Procedures Manual. The guiding principles and policies that direct those procedures are outlined here.

4.2.1 Review by Collections Staff:

If an artifact is determined to meet one or more of the criteria listed in section 4.1, collections staff will review the paper and electronic records for the artifact to confirm that all documentation is accurate and complete. Incomplete records will be completed as much as possible before proceeding. If clear and unrestricted title cannot be determined from the available paperwork, the deaccessioning process will stop.

4.2.2 Review by Collections Review Committee (CRC):

Collections staff will recommend to the Collections Review Committee that the artifact be deaccessioned. At this time, the recommended disposition of the artifact to take place after deaccessioning will also be made clear. The Committee must approve the recommendation or the action will stop and the artifact will remain in its collection. This is the final step for UER artifacts.

4.2.3 Review by Board's Collections Strategy and Policy Committee (CSPC):

An approved recommendation from the Collections Review Committee for deaccessioning a permanent collection artifact will be presented to the CSPC at their next regularly scheduled meeting. Only upon approval by the CSPC will the deaccessioning process proceed. If the recommendation is denied, the artifact will remain in its collection.

4.2.4 Review by the Board of Directors:

An approved recommendation from the CSPC for deaccessioning a permanent collection artifact will be presented to the full Board for final approval. Only upon approval by the Board will the deaccessioning process proceed. If the recommendation is denied, the artifact will remain in its collection.

4.2.5 Documenting Deaccessioning:

All deaccessioning decisions and actions will be documented using the Museum's collections database system, and all paper records will be updated. The original Deaccessioning Form will be signed by representatives from the CRC and the CSPC and finally by the Board President. Transfer Receipts and Witness of Destruction forms will be signed by the Registrar. This paperwork and associated files will be retained. Object identification numbers that were applied to an artifact when it was first accepted will not be removed during the deaccessioning process.

4.3 DISPOSAL OF DEACCESSIONED ARTIFACTS

An artifact being deaccessioned will be disposed of according to the action recorded on the Deaccessioning Form. The following are approved methods of disposal:

- Transfer of a permanent collection artifact to the UER collection, or vice versa, or to the Family History and Genealogy Center
- Transfer to another museum, archive, library, or other entity
- Public sales such as by auction, eBay, or professional dealer
- Discard/destroy

4.4 RESTRICTIONS FOR DEACCESSIONED ARTIFACTS

Deaccessioned artifacts will not be returned directly to original donors or their families or representatives. If artifacts are to be sold at public sales, donors may be notified of the impending sale. They may participate if they choose.

Monies from public auctions will be used only to acquire new artifacts for the collections. Artifacts removed from the collections will not be sold at any time to fund general operations. Consistent with museum industry ethical standards, The Danish Immigrant Museum will not capitalize collections or treat them as financial assets.

Artifacts sold at public auction may not be purchased by anyone directly associated with the Museum, including Board members, staff, and volunteers. Museum representatives may not directly and/or personally gain or benefit from artifact donations, deaccessions, or dispersals.

XI. Deaccessions

From time to time, The Grace Museum may deaccession objects from its collection. The purpose of deaccessioning is to improve the collection by refining the focus to better adhere to the Museum's Mission. The Museum will deaccession objects only after careful review, following a strict set of criteria and in accordance with the

highest professional and ethical standards. In this collections management policy, deaccession refers to the process by which an object is formally removed from the Museum's permanent collection. Disposal is the means by which the deaccessioned object is then physically removed from the Museum.

Objects in the collection will be considered for deaccession on the written recommendation of the Chief Curator. The recommendation will be presented to the Executive Director, then, following approval, to the Collections Committee. If the committee votes to approve deaccession, it will take the recommendation to the Board of Trustees for final approval.

Objects may be considered for deaccession if:

- an object does not fit in with the Museum's Mission, Scope or Collections Plan
- an object is discovered to be a copy, fake, forgery or has a mistaken attribution
- an object is a duplicate of another in the collection
- a better example will be or has been acquired
- the Museum can no longer care for the object in an appropriate manner
- an object's condition has deteriorated beyond use or repair
- an object will be better served in another institution's collection
- an object is determined to have an aesthetically, culturally or historically insufficient quality or significance
- an object poses a threat to the health and safety of people or to the other objects in the collection

The Museum must maintain an accessioned object in its collection for a minimum of two years from the date of accession before it may consider deaccessioning. As a courtesy, the Museum will make a reasonable effort to notify the donor or the donor's heirs of the impending deaccession and disposal of such objects within ten years of receiving the gift. This does not constitute a request for permission. Objects to which precatory restrictions apply will not be deaccessioned or disposed of until reasonable efforts are made to comply with the restricting conditions. If the Museum finds itself at an impasse, it shall seek legal counsel before proceeding with the deaccession. If the artist of a work of art that is to be deaccessioned is still living, the Museum shall notify the artist and may consider returning it to the artist or exchanging it for another work by the same artist.

Accessioned objects that are discovered to be missing may not be deaccessioned. Instead, the documentation must be notated to indicate that the object cannot be located.

XII. Disposition

After an object has been deaccessioned from the collection, the Museum may dispose of objects in the following ways (in preferred order):

- gift, exchange or sale to an appropriate, non-profit museum or educational institution
- sale at a public, advertised, third party auction
- destruction of the object if it poses a threat to human safety, has deteriorated beyond repair or is a fake or forgery
- if the possession of the object by the Museum was found to be illegitimate, the object will be given back to the legitimate owner as determined by the proper authority

Museum board members, staff, volunteers, spouses and immediate family members are prohibited from being given or sold objects deaccessioned from the permanent collection. The Museum may provide information on the object to the recipient, but may not represent the value of the object. It must inform the recipients of deaccessioned objects of any hazards the object may pose.

Records pertaining to the deaccession will be permanently maintained by the Museum. The Collections Manager is responsible for properly documenting and recording all aspects of the deaccession and disposal. If an object is destroyed, a written statement from an impartial observer who witnessed the destruction must be included in the documentation. The Collections Manager will also remove accession numbers from the deaccessioned object unless it is being transferred to another museum.

A. Proceeds

All proceeds from the sale of an object deaccessioned from the permanent collection will be deposited in a Collections Fund that may only be used for new acquisitions and the direct care of the collection. Such funds may not be used to defray ongoing operating expenses. This does not apply to proceeds from non-accessioned objects.

Deaccessioning Policy and Procedures

Reappraisal

The Hopkinton Historical Society has been actively collecting since its inception in 1875. Although the Society's collection continues to grow, the available space to house the collection has remained the same. Over the course of this long history the Society has altered the scope of what it collects, from objects around the United States and abroad, to a focus centered on the Hopkinton area. During this period the Society has also received finer examples of many objects and now holds many duplicates in its possession. To prevent overcrowding and potential damage to pieces, it is therefore necessary for the Society to occasionally systematically review its collections holdings and remove objects which no longer fit the Society's mission. Although reappraisal may not always lead to deaccessioning, the Society always analyzes its holdings before selecting items for deaccessioning. The objective of reappraisals of the collection is the removal of less relevant pieces in order to maximize conservation and preservation resources available for those objects which most clearly fit the mission of the Society; to preserve and maintain collections items that "document or illuminate the town's history."

The following policy and procedure document outlines the steps that will be taken by the Society when making deaccessioning and disposal decisions. All policies follow the guidelines as set forth in the American Association of Museums 2003 *Code of Ethics for Museums*.

What is Deaccessioning?

Deaccessioning is the official removal of accessioned objects, maintained by the Society in public trust, from the Society's care. Once deaccessioned the Society no longer maintains that object as part of its permanent collection. Unlike accessioned objects in the permanent collection, deaccessioned objects may be disposed of through permanent transfer to another Museum, sale, or use in destructive analysis or programs. The following policy outlines the criteria the Society uses to evaluate deaccessions during the reappraisal process, and the procedure of disposing of deaccessions. This policy supersedes all earlier deaccessioning and disposal policies.

Criteria for Deaccessioning

Criteria for deaccessioning closely mirror the Society's accessioning policies. It is important to note that deaccessioning occurs as part of the reappraisal process and that the Society does not accession items with the intent to deaccession. Potential reasons for deaccessioning may include:

- Unrelated to Mission - Subject matter does not fall into one of the 3 collection categories outlined in the Society's collecting plan (historical, town, and representative).
- Unstable Condition – Object is of unstable condition and cannot be properly preserved by the Society, or the object has deteriorated to the point where it can no longer be used in display, research, or educational programs.
- Object is Repetitive – The collection contains similar examples in better condition, with more detailed documentation of greater historical value.

Appendix B: Hopkinton Historical Society

- Public Safety Hazard - Item poses a safety hazard to staff, volunteers, and visitors which cannot be mitigated (explosive, toxic, etc).
- Preservation Hazard – object poses a hazard to the long term preservation of other collections materials (an infestation which cannot be destroyed, offgassing which cannot be contained, etc).
- Human Remains/Culturally Sensitive Objects – Includes objects that fall under NAGPRA legislation and other repatriation claims.
- Object Lacks Original Integrity – Object has been altered to the point that it no longer retains key original characteristics. Object is found to be a reproduction, fake or forgery.
- Museum Transfer - Object is key to the mission of another museum where it could be better accessed by public and researchers and/or displayed in context or reunited with associated materials.
- Stolen or Illegally Obtained - The object has unethical or illegal provenance. It may have been stolen or illegally looted from an archaeological site.
- For use in Destructive Activity – Object would better serve the Society’s mission through destructive analysis for research, or use in hands on educational programs and demonstrations. Objects used in in these manners would be subjected to potential damage inconsistent with the Society’s overall standard of care for its permanent collection. These objects should therefore be deaccessioned from the permanent collection prior to use in destructive activities.

- Society Does Not Hold Legal Title – Object on loan was accidentally accessioned and the Society does not hold legal title to the object. Once deaccessioned the object may be returned to its rightful owner.
- Prohibitive Care Costs - Cost of storage or conservation is prohibitive and beyond the resources available to the Society.

Ability to Deaccession

Although an object may fit one of the criterion above for consideration to deaccession, certain aspects of the object may prevent the Society from officially deaccessioning and removing the object from its collection. Below is a list of conditions which may prevent deaccessioning of undesirable materials:

- Donor Restrictions – The Donor of that object has placed a restriction on removing the item from the Society's collection. In these cases the Society will strive to contact the donor in an attempt to amend the restriction or receive legal guidance as to how the Society may remove the restriction.
- Ownership – The Society does not have official title to the object and has been unable to locate the rightful owner.
- The Society has recently accessioned the item in the past two years and the donor has received a tax write off for the donation.

The above criteria stipulate legal restrictions which may prevent deaccessioning, but the Society also adheres to ethical restrictions.

- Monetary Gain - The Society will not deaccession relevant objects from its collection for monetary gain. Monetizing portions of the collection for use as financial assets

- would run counter to the Society's reason for existence. It would weaken the Society's credibility with its donors and the public, cause damage to the credibility of all Museums in the eye of the public, and have potential legal ramifications (Collections holdings are not required to be listed as assets on tax documentation, using collections objects as financial assets when not previously listed as such may constitute tax fraud).
- Public Perception – The Society will not deaccession pieces which may cause serious public outcry and offense to donors without first analyzing the situation and involving key stakeholders to mitigate any bad press and/or loss of donor support.

Authority to Deaccession

Objects that meet one of the deaccessioning criterion listed above may be presented for review by the Society's Collections Representative, or staff member in charge of collections. The Collections Representative will analyze all proposed deaccessions. Objects confirmed by the Collections Representative to fall within the Society's deaccessioning parameters will be taken to an outside consultant for a second review. The consultant review will be taken into consideration and the Collections Representative will provide final recommendations for deaccessioning to the Society's Collection Committee for final approval. Objects of value greater than \$1,500 must also be brought before the Board for final approval. Once approved by the Collections Committee, the objects may be officially deaccessioned from the collection. Objects which were never accessioned into the collection do not need to go through the deaccessioning approval and disposal process.

Transparency

The Society recognizes that deaccessioning is a controversial procedure for those outside of the Museum profession. In order to prevent loss of faith in the Society and other non-profit collecting institutions the Society will follow a policy of transparency and ethical behavior when selecting objects for deaccession and later disposing of these objects. The Society will educate individuals making deaccessioning decisions of these procedures and potential public opinion risks of deaccessioning. The Society will clearly document the decision process for selection and disposal of each object and provide these to the public at request. The Society will provide a clear and concise summary of its policies online in order to promote a greater understanding of Museum practices in jargon-free language and better educate its constituency.

Documentation

In compliance with its policy of transparency, the Society will keep detailed records on its decisions for deaccessioning and disposal. These records will be maintained as part of the Society's permanent archival record. As soon as an object has initial approval for deaccessioning by the Society's Curator, a Deaccession and Disposal Processing Worksheet should be filed for that object. This worksheet should be retained after the object is deaccessioned in the Society's deaccession files, or if deaccession was not approved in the Society's object files. Additional documentation which should be kept includes; original assessment notes from systematic collection reappraisals, notes from expert appraisals, and transfer of property forms.

Once deaccessioned the object's original accession files should be marked as deaccessioned and placed in a dead file, the object's PastPerfect database record should also

be updated. Once an object is deaccessioned its original accession number will not be reused.

All original object files will be maintained with each object's deaccession records.

Disposal Policy and Procedures

Disposal

Disposal is the process through which the Society removes deaccessioned objects from its collection storage; most often this involves the removal of the object from Museum property. The Society follows a strict disposal policy to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest and unethical use of funds during the disposal process. This policy is laid out in detail in the following pages.

Transfer to Rightful Owner

In rare cases the Society may have accidentally accessioned an item for which it does not hold clear title. In cases where a claim has been placed and substantiated by the rightful owner, the Society should immediately deaccession the object and transfer the object to the rightful owner. A transfer of ownership form should be completed.

Found In Collection Objects

The Society will strive to identify objects and determine whether they have full ownership to an object prior to deaccessioning. For items where the original owner cannot be identified or located, and for which the object can be considered abandoned property under the *New Hampshire Museum Abandoned Property Act* the Society will follow all State guidelines to receive clear title prior to deaccessioning.

Disposal Priority

The Society recognizes that certain methods of disposal more closely adhere to a donor's original intent than others. The following list details the methods for disposal in order of preference.

1.) Transfer to another Museum – A preferred method of disposal is the transfer of the object to another Museum, allowing the object to stay in the public sphere. All objects not requested back by their donors will be posted through the New England Museum Association (NEMA). Member museums will be given 2 months to respond to the posting and request objects. Museums outside of New England may be separately contacted if an object is key to the mission of that institution, these Museum's will similarly have 2 months to respond with interest to a posting.

2.) Transfer to Hopkinton Non-profit – If an object will further the mission of a non-profit in the Hopkinton area, the object may be transferred to the non-profit in order to keep that object in the public sphere. Pieces of significant historical importance will not be transferred to institutions that do not have the capacity to properly care for these objects.

3.) Public Sale – If there are no viable disposal options which would keep an object in the public sphere the Society may dispose of objects through public auction.

4.) Destructive Use – Items deaccessioned for destructive use may be used by the Museum in ways inconsistent with the preservation requirements of that object. This may include use in an educational program or as set dressing where the object may undergo rigorous handling, or for destructive analysis and research.

5.) Recycling Items – Low value items may be donated to second hand or charity organizations for reuse.

6.) Destruction – Objects damaged beyond repair may be destroyed, or taken to a local dump. Hazardous objects, such as ammunition, or chemicals should be brought to an appropriate disposal facility prior to destruction. Archaeological research objects for which all analysis is completed should be destroyed in a manner which will not mislead future archaeologists.

In all cases of disposal, the Society should remove all Society numbering systems from the object before object transfer. In disposal options 1-3 a copy of all relevant paperwork should be given to the new owner of the object.

The Society will strive to prevent any situations during the disposal process which result in an actual or perceived conflict of interest. The Society will therefore prohibit staff, volunteers, Collections Committee members, board members and their immediate families from bidding on pieces put up for public auction. Appraisers hired for consultation during the deaccessioning review process, will likewise be prohibited from purchasing or receiving monetary gain from those items that they reviewed. When transferring objects to other museums, requests will be granted in the order received, unless the object is of key importance to the mission of a particular museum. In these cases preference will be given to the museum for which the object holds key importance.

Use of Proceeds

The Society strives to maintain the highest ethical standards when designating appropriate use of funds derived from deaccessioned collections materials. The Society follows the guidelines put forth by the American Association of Museums Code of Ethics that “proceeds from sales resulting from deaccessioning can only be used for acquisitions or direct care of

collections.” As well as the ethical standards put forth by the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH) which specifies that “history museums can use such funds only for acquisition or preservation” and the standards put forth by the American Association of Museums (AAM) which specify that “in no event shall they [deaccession funds] be used for anything other than acquisition or direct care of collections.”

As stated in the New Hampshire Antiquarian 2011 Annual Review of Funds, “All accessions, deaccessions, and preservation expenses for all the society’s collections are reflected in the Collections Committee Fund.” All funds derived from the sale of accessioned collections and archival materials shall be placed in the Collections Committee Fund. All appreciation/depreciation is to remain in the fund, as are any earnings. These funds may be used for one-time expenditures for a) new acquisitions or b) materials and expertise to ensure the long-term preservation of the collection and archives. All reoccurring collections care costs, including but not limited to salaries and rent will be restricted from using Collections Committee Fund monies. These restrictions have been placed on the Collections Committee Fund to ensure that there is no perceived or real threat that the Society may use its collection as a monetary asset to fund routine operating costs of maintaining the collection.

Deaccessioning Process and Disposal

It is the Museum's intention when accepting an object into the Permanent Collections that that object will remain a permanent part of the collection. It is not normally the practice of the Museum to deaccession items. However, to effectively manage and maintain appropriate collections, it may from time to time be necessary to transfer ownership or dispose of inappropriate and/or duplicate, extraneous objects. Therefore, the Museum will not collect any object that it cannot deaccession, should such an action be required. For more information on abandoned property, refer to the *Collections Procedures Manual*.

The final decision on deaccessioning will be made by the Board of Trustees upon recommendation by the President and the Board Education & Collections Committee.

A. Definition

Deaccessioning is the process of removing an accessioned item permanently from the collections. The deaccessioning process shall be cautious and deliberate.

Disposal is the means by which a deaccessioned object is physically removed from the collections.

Disposal of deaccessioned items may occur in several ways. The method should be selected by the Collections & Exhibits Department staff on the basis of the best benefit to the Museum. The following list of allowable disposition methods is in preferential order:

1. *Trade/Exchange Gift*: In order to avoid any appearance of unethical actions, the Museum may trade, exchange, or give deaccessioned material only to other educational institutions.
2. *Maintained in the Museum's non-accessioned collections*: For use in interpretive or other programs and uses that support the mission and/or operations of the Museum.
3. *Sale*: By public auction (anonymously or openly) on the decision of the Board of Trustees Education & Collections Committee.
4. *Sale*: Other forms of auction such as sealed or invited bids.
5. *Sale/Trade/Exchange*: Private party, at a price determined by at least one independent appraisal. There should be compelling evidence that this method provides the greatest benefit to the Museum, and will not be seen as primarily benefiting the private party.
6. *Discard*: Items of no value to the Museum, and for which another home is unlikely to be found, may be jettisoned or destroyed.

The Museum will dispose of any hazardous material in accordance with all city, parish, state, and federal laws.

B. Deaccession Criteria

Items to be considered for deaccessioning must meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. The material or item is outside the scope of, or incompatible with, the mission of the Museum.

2. The material or item has failed to retain its identify or authenticity and has deteriorated to the point where it is beyond conservation.
3. The material or item has been lost or stolen and remains lost for more than two years.
4. The material or item duplicates other items in the collections.
5. The Museum is unable to provide proper care and storage for the item.
6. The material or item has properties which may be harmful to staff or other items in the collection.

C. Restrictions

Before any material or object is recommended for deaccessioning, or is deaccessioned, reasonable efforts shall be made to ascertain that the Museum is legally free to do so. Where restrictions to the disposition of the material or item are found, these procedures will be followed:

1. All efforts will be made to honor the restrictions.
2. If the restriction cannot be complied with, the staff shall seek the advice of legal counsel.

No donated item shall be deaccessioned for any reason for at least two years after the date of its acquisition (see U.S. Tax Reform Act of 1984 and IRS regulations).

Materials and objects shall not be given, sold, or otherwise transferred, publicly or privately, to Museum employees, volunteers, officers, trustees, or their immediate family members or representatives.

Appendix B: National WWII Museum

The disposal of objects through sale, trade, or research activities is solely for the advancement of the Museum's mission. The proceeds from these sales shall be placed in a restricted museum collections fund. This fund may only be used for the purchased, care, or conservation of historic materials.

The Museum shall ensure that all deaccessioning activities are conducted in a manner that respects the protection and preservation of cultural resources and discourages illicit trade in such materials. Such activities shall also conform to the Museum's mission and public trust responsibilities.

Division cannot grant rights to reproduce objects in the collection for any purpose. The acquisition of copyright is handled by the registrar's office when transfer documents are signed for new acquisitions.

The Division shall ensure that a valid deed of gift is created to document transfer of ownership for objects donated and that a valid bill of sale is secured for objects purchased. These documents shall fully describe the objects to which they pertain, record the precise conditions of transfer, convey title of ownership (including intellectual property rights, when possible) to the Division, and be signed by the donor/vendor and an authorized representative of the Division. The Museum Registrar shall keep all documentation related to objects as part of the permanent accession.

Objects promised to the Division as future gifts or bequests will not be presented to the Acquisitions Committee unless the intent of the donor is expressed in a written instrument that is irrevocable and binding.

V. Deaccessions

Deaccessioning is the formal process of permanently removing an acquisition from the collections of the Division. The purpose of deaccessioning an acquisition is to allow for the improvement of the overall quality of the collection. The deaccessioning process for artifacts is lengthy and prevents random or rash decisions. The Chief Curator generally initiates the process of deaccessioning, with input from the Curation Section staff. It is the responsibility of the Collections Management staff to actually dispose of deaccessioned items.

Criteria for deaccessioning:

1. The artifact is no longer relevant and useful to the mission of the Division.
2. The Division cannot preserve the artifact.
3. The artifact has deteriorated beyond usefulness.

4. There is a need or opportunity to upgrade the collection.
5. The object poses a hazard or risk to other objects in the collection or to staff.

Authority: N.C.G.S. § 121-4(6)

All deaccessions shall be considered by and voted on by the Division's Acquisition Committee for disposition. The following personnel at the North Carolina Division of State History Museums must approve the deaccessioning of artifacts: the sponsoring curator, the Chief Curator, the Collections Manager, and the Division Director. From there, the proposed objects are reviewed by the DCR Acquisitions Committee and the North Carolina Historical Commission, and they, in turn, vote whether to concur or not with the proposed deaccessioning.

Disposal:

1. Once deaccessioned, an artifact's disposition shall be decided by the North Carolina Historical Commission upon the recommendation of the Chief Curator, the Curation Section, the North Carolina Museum of History, or their designee(s), in consultation with the curatorial and conservation staffs and the Collections Manager. In choosing a means of disposal, the Division must preserve and promote scrupulous adherence to ethical standards as observed by the profession.
2. The greatest benefit to the Division should govern the means of disposal, as long as there is no compromise or appearance of compromise in ethical conduct.
3. Preferred methods of disposal are: transfer or exchange with another public institution or sale through publicly advertised auction. Every effort should be taken to identify and evaluate the various advantages and benefits available through different means of disposal.

- a. If an artifact cannot be disposed of through preferred methods, other options may be explored and then proposed to the Chief Curator.
- b. In the case of disposal by public auction, the Division's ownership shall be acknowledged in the sale catalog unless deemed inappropriate by the Division Director.
- c. Any proceeds realized from the sale of deaccessioned objects shall be deposited and used only for further acquisitions as per N.C.G.S. § 121-7.
- d. As a last resort, materials with a condition that is too poor for resale, exchange, or transfer may be disposed of in a sensitive manner.

VI. Loans

Loans are temporary assignments of collection objects from the Division or temporary assignments of similar objects to the Division for stated purposes, such as exhibition and research. These assignments do not involve a change in ownership.

The Division cannot hope to acquire title to all objects it needs in its exhibits and interpretive programs. Therefore, the Division will also accept, for a limited time, custody of objects belonging to others for the purpose of exhibition, examination, authentication, and research. The Division also recognizes that it owns objects that can benefit the programs and exhibitions of other museums or sites, and therefore, the Division will lend objects to other agencies whenever feasible.

It is the policy of the Division not to loan objects to individuals for any reason. Loans are only made to nonprofit, educational institutions with

Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent

IV. DEACCESSIONS

A. Authority

1. The final authority to deaccession and dispose of objects from AKMP's collection rests with the museum's Board of Trustees.

2. Deaccessioning and disposal of objects from the collection must comply with all applicable local, state and U. S. Federal laws in force at the time and must observe any terms and conditions set by the donor when the object(s) was acquired by the museum.

B. General Statements

1. The Board of Trustees of Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia recognizes that the process of removing objects from the collection is a serious action that may only be approved after careful and serious deliberation. Realizing the inherent dangers in any deaccessioning, everyone involved in the process must attempt to identify any potential future use for object(s) in question.

2. Deaccessioning shall take place in an open and public manner so that all parties may have the opportunity to comment and to object, if they see fit, to insure that all decisions may be justified both legally and ethically.

3. No object shall be deaccessioned or disposed of in order to provide financial support for institutional operations, facilities maintenance or any reason other than the acquisition, conservation or direct care of collection.

4. Since Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia holds its collection in trust for the public, it is the museum's strong preference that deaccessioned objects remain both 1) in the public domain and 2) accessible to the public.

5. AKMP realizes that it has a public accountability for its decision to deaccession and the method by which it chooses to dispose of an object. AKMP is to make no effort to conceal the transaction.

6. All funds realized from the deaccessioning of collection items shall be placed in a restricted

fund. The interest realized on this fund, and in special cases the principal, may only be spent for collection acquisition or conservation. Any other use of the Collection Fund shall require the express permission of AKMP's Board of Trustees.

7. No funds shall be spent from the Collection Fund without the prior approval of the Collection Committee of the museum's Board of Trustees.

C. Criteria

Objects in Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia's collection may be considered for deaccessioning for one or more of the following reasons:

1. The object was acquired contrary to AKMP's collection policy.
2. The object is outside the scope of the collection as defined in the acquisition criteria.
3. The object is duplicate or redundant, and AKMP has no further use for it.
4. The object lacks physical integrity and has lost its historical value.

5. The object threatens the physical safety of the staff, visitors, the facility or other collection objects, and this condition cannot be remedied.

6. A better example of the object has been acquired by the museum.

7. AKMP cannot properly care for the object.

8. Deaccessioning the object may be shown to serve the best interests of AKMP and the public.

D. Restrictions

1. AKMP staff, volunteers, members of the Board of Trustees and members of their immediate families are not permitted to acquire deaccessioned objects, either directly or indirectly, or to otherwise benefit from its sale or trade.

2. No action pertaining to deaccessioning and disposal of objects from AKMP's collection may be undertaken that would impair the integrity and good standing of the museum within its community at large and within the profession.

E. Procedures for Deaccessioning

Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia understands that the procedures for deaccessioning from the collection are much more stringent than those for acquisition.

An acquired object remains in the collection and may be evaluated for quality and value. Once an object is deaccessioned it may receive no second consideration by the museum.

1. Objects may be deaccessioned from Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia's collection in the following ways:

a. transfer to the education or research collections,

- b. public auction,
- c. gift to another museum or educational institution,
- d. trade with another museum or educational institution,
- e. sale to another museum or educational institution,
- f. if it is determined that an object cannot be sold and can not be transferred to

another educational institution, an object may be destroyed.

Any other method of disposal of an object must have the express approval of Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia's Board of Trustees.

2. Objects may not be deaccessioned unless they have been in the collection for at least three years.
3. If an object received as a gift or bequest is sold or exchanged, any object acquired through this sale or exchange is to be credited to the original donor and the donor's name assigned to all published credits for the new acquisition or acquisitions.
4. Efforts shall be made to consult with the donor, near relatives or locatable heirs of the donor.
5. Informative statements concerning the sale or exchange of objects in the collection shall routinely be included in periodic publications of the museum. More detailed information is available on request.
6. The Curator of Collections and the staff of the Collection Department are responsible for identifying objects in the collection for deaccessioning. The Curator of Collections is responsible for managing the process of deaccessioning of objects from AKMP's collection.

7. The procedure for deaccessioning an object from the collection is as follows:
 - a. When the Curator of Collections has determined that an object should be deaccessioned, he or she shall prepare a written evaluation and circulate it to appropriate staff of the museum. Staff may add their comments to those of the Curator of Collections.
 - b. When staff have had the opportunity to review and comment on the Curator's evaluation, the Curator shall submit a written request to deaccession the object to the Executive Director. The request shall include all written evaluations, a copy of the original deed of gift and any original gift restrictions. The Executive Director may seek the opinion of outside experts in the appropriate scholarly field. The Executive Director may also seek an independent appraisal of the object.
 - c. Following the approval of the Executive Director, the Curator of Collections shall submit the request to deaccession to the Collection Committee of the Board of Trustees. The Collection Committee may seek legal review of the request. All relevant documentation should accompany the request to the Collection Committee.
 - d. If the Collection Committee approves the object for deaccessioning, the Chair of the Collection Committee shall seek the approval of the Board of Trustees to deaccession the object.
 - e. The Curator of Collections with the approval of the Executive Director shall select the method of disposal.

8. All records relating to a deaccessioned object shall remain as part of the permanent collection records of the museum. The Registrar is responsible for maintaining the records on deaccessioned objects. These records shall include but are not limited to:

- a. the original object file;
- b. any catalog cards;
- c. all correspondence (including notations of telephone conversations);
- d. all reports generated by AKMP staff, outside experts and appraisers;
- e. a record of the action of the Board of Trustees, i.e. minutes of meetings;
- f. authorization to deaccession signed by the Curator of Collections, Executive Director, Chair of the Collection Committee and the President of the Board of Trustees;
- g. statement of final disposition signed by the Curator of Collections;
- h. any photographs of the object.

Deaccessions

1. To effectively manage and maintain appropriate collections, the Board has authorized deaccessions to be presented for their consideration. Upon review and approval for deaccession, an object is then considered permanently removed from the collections of Shelburne Museum.
2. Any object or collection of objects considered for deaccessioning must meet at least one of the following criteria:
 - The object is no longer relevant and useful for the purposes and activities of the Museum.
 - The object does not fit in with the collecting policy of the Museum.
 - The object is duplicated in the collection with other examples of superior quality and/or provenance.
 - The object was inappropriately accessioned into the permanent collection.
 - The Museum can no longer maintain and preserve the object as part of the permanent collection.
 - The object has deteriorated beyond repair and is no longer useful for exhibition or educational purposes.
3. All prospective deaccessions will be reviewed and approved by the Director with appropriate input from the Collections Management, Curatorial and Conservation Departments. ***Recommendation for Deaccession*** forms are then completed and presented to the Collections Committee. Based on the Committee's review, all or a portion of the objects reviewed will be presented for the consideration and approval of

the full Board. At the meeting of the full Board, any member of the Board may request the removal of an object or objects from the deaccession list.

4. The Director of Collections Management will make a good faith effort to contact to donors of items to inform them of the Museum's intention to deaccession an item. This stipulation only applies to donated (not bequeathed) objects received within the last 20 years; before this date the Museum does not have to attempt to contact the donor. Deaccessioned items cannot be returned to donors, they have the option to purchase the items at the current fair market value.
5. *A Recommendation for Deaccession* form will be created for each object or group of objects and will include the following information:
 - Source, catalog number and accession number;
 - Description, exhibition history and provenance;
 - Statement of deaccession reasoning;
 - Acquisition information and current appraised value;
 - Proposed disposition method.

This form will be signed by the appropriate Curator, Director of Collections Management, and, upon Board approval, the Director of the Museum.

Final disposition will be added to the form as the object is processed and is physically removed from the collection.

6. Objects approved for deaccession will be disposed from the collection as follows:
 - Transferred to another Museum department for appropriate use;
 - Transferred to another, more appropriate, not-for-profit institution;

- Sold to another, more appropriate institution;
- Sold back to the previous owner at current fair market value
(only if the Museum agreed to such an action upon acceptance of the acquisition);
- Sold at public auction (with or without public acknowledgement of Shelburne Museum as the previous owner)
- Disposal by destruction in case of extreme poor condition (e.g. mold, insect damage)

In no case will any object be transferred to a member of the staff or Board, current or past, or their representatives.

Each form of disposition will be specified on each deaccession form for Board review and approval.

7. The deaccession program is coordinated through the Collections Management department with appropriate input from the Curatorial department. All records are kept on permanent file in the Collections Management department.
8. All proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned objects will be deposited in the **Acquisitions Fund**. This fund is available for the purchase of acquisitions for the permanent collection, packing and transportation costs involved in delivering acquisitions, appraisals for deaccession actions, costs involved with reviewing or considering an object for acquisition, and overnight delivery fees for acquisition payments or documents.

The Acquisitions Fund, with formal Board review and approval, may be used for special projects are directly related to a new acquisition by gift or bequest, including but not limited to storage or conservation needs. In the case of such proposed use, the Senior Curator, Director of Collections Management or Director of Preservation and Conservation must submit a full report to the Director who will then make a determination if the request should be reviewed by the Collections Committee, then, with their recommendation, to the full Board.

The Director of Collections Management will be responsible to record the activity in this fund and must present written reports to the Collections Committee and Board as required.

9. Loaned objects may be deaccessioned as abandoned property upon advice of legal counsel and approval of the Collections Committee. There must be clear documentation that the owner has not contacted the Museum for 3 years following the end of the loan and that the Museum has been unsuccessful in its attempts during those 3 years to contact the owner. (Refer to Vermont Statutes Title 27: Property Chapter 12: Museum Property).

Items deemed not suitable for the General History Collection or its sub-categories, may be considered candidate(s) for the Education/Prop Collection. Recommendations to accession objects or documents into the Society's two collections are made by a staff collections committee consisting of professional staff members appointed by the Executive Director. The final decision on acquisition shall be made by the Board of Trustees, and shall take into account, the recommendation of the staff collections committee.

It is sometimes impractical to evaluate all material at the time of acquisition. Upon evaluation, some material may be declared expendable. This situation may hold particularly true of large collections destined for the Research Library and should be considered part of the normal course of acquisition processing, not of deaccessioning.

VI. Deaccessioning

Deaccessioning is the term used to describe the process of removing an accessioned object or document permanently from the General History Collection. The Society may determine that some objects or documents in the General History Collection may be deaccessioned. Basic considerations are:

- A. Is the object or document no longer relevant and useful to the purposes and activities of the Society?
- B. Is the Society unable to preserve the object or documents properly?
- C. Has the objects or documents deteriorated beyond usefulness?
- D. Is it doubtful that the object or documents can be utilized in the foreseeable future?
- E. Is there a need to improve or strengthen another area of the General History Collection in order to further the goals of the Society?
- F. Are the objects or documents duplicates?
- G. Does the Society have legal title to the object or documents? Objects or documents that the Society does not have full title to might not be eligible for deaccessioning, except in accordance with ORS 358.420.
- H. Are there restrictions on use or disposition attached to the objects or documents? Such restrictions might not allow an object or document to be deaccessioned. Any questions concerning restrictions on objects or documents should be referred to the Society attorney.

Appendix B: Southern Oregon Historical Society

These considerations may also apply to real property owned by the Society.

Recommendations for deaccessioning will be made by the staff collections team. Such recommendations will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees and must be approved by the Board before the deaccessioning can occur.

Concerning the disposition of deaccessioned artifacts:

- A. The manner of disposition chosen shall be in the best interests of the Society, the public it serves, the public trust it represents in owning the collection, and the scholarly and scientific communities it represents. The staff collections team will recommend a method of disposal along with the recommendation for deaccessioning for consideration and judgment by the Board of Trustees.
- B. Acceptable methods of disposal are:
 - 1. Transfer to the Education/Prop Collection if there is a foreseeable need for the object or documents in that collection.
 - 2. Transfer through exchange, gift, or sale to another non-profit institution.
 - 3. Sale through public auction.
 - 4. Discard if the object or documents possess a health or safety hazard or are in such a deteriorated state to be of no value.
- C. Proceeds generated from deaccessioning as described in subsection B above, or from the sale of unwanted items as described in Section V., subsection L., shall be used for future acquisitions and/or care of the existing General History Collection.
- D. Objects or documents may not be returned to their original donor, the donor's heirs, or any private individual, except by proper purchase of such objects or documents by such individual(s) through public sale or auction or, if the donor was a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation, by purchase for fair value, or exchange for item(s) of comparable value.
- E. Thorough documentation of the disposition of deaccessioned items will be maintained as part of the Society's collection records.

Appendix C: Request for Participation

Hello!

I am looking for museum staff with experience deaccessioning in history museums specifically to interview for my master's thesis at the University of Washington Museology Program.

My thesis studies how museums are practicing deaccessioning proactively to refine collections for more sustainable management, access and care, and encompasses information on the context of the deaccessioning, preparation, procedures used, criteria for selecting material to deaccession, and disposal. I am hoping to illustrate how the practice of deaccessioning is becoming more widely accepted as a necessary tool for responsible collections management as well as some of the ways it could be better supported. I am particularly interested in projects that have reviewed entire collections and combed through them for objects to deaccession rather than individual object deaccessions.

Interviews can be conducted over the phone or in person according to your preference, and with permission I would audio-record the interview for my own notes.

If you would like to volunteer or know anyone who might be interested in talking with me I would love to hear from you. I also welcome any questions or comments at Tomasina@live.com.

Thank you for your consideration!

Tomasina de Vitis
Museology MA Candidate | University of Washington