

Collections Management Policy

Saugatuck-Douglas History Center - June 2023

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I. MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center (SDHC) is to preserve local history and inspire learning to inform and improve our community.

The SDHC will collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit the rich historical and cultural heritage of the Saugatuck, Douglas, and Saugatuck Township area.

The SDHC serves as the community's sole historical archive and collecting institution. The SDHC provides stewardship for significant local heritage through its care for collections and support for permanent and changing exhibitions. The collection represents a diverse heritage and will be accessible to all.

II. COLLECTING OBJECTIVES OF THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

The SDHC strives to collect, preserve, interpret, and make available for research items and archival material that fulfill and further the mission of SDHC.

These collections will document the past and the unfolding multicultural history of Saugatuck, Douglas, Saugatuck Township and vicinity; to maintain and build upon the present collection of items and archival/photographic material; and maintain and increase existing documentation on these collections.

III. CODE OF ETHICS

The History Center adheres to the Code of Ethics adopted by the American Alliance of Societies (AAM), and all staff/volunteers in individual departments (collections, archives, curatorial, administration) adhere to the standards of practice of their respective professional associations. The AAM Code of Ethics can be found here: <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/code-of-ethics-for-museums/>

Collections Philosophy and Responsibility

The distinctive character of museum ethics derives from the ownership, care, and use of objects, specimens, and living collections representing the world's natural and cultural commonwealth. This stewardship of collections entails the highest public trust and carries with it the presumption of rightful ownership, permanence, care, documentation, accessibility, and responsible disposal.

Thus, the SDHC ensures that:

- collections in its custody support its mission and public trust responsibilities;
- collections in its custody are lawfully held, protected, secure, unencumbered, cared for, and preserved
- collections in its custody are accounted for and documented;

- access to the collections and related information is permitted and regulated;
- acquisition, disposal, and loan activities are conducted in a manner that respects the protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources and discourages illicit trade in such materials;
- acquisition, disposal, and loan activities conform to its mission and public trust responsibilities;
- disposal of collections through sale, trade or research activities is solely for the advancement of the museum's mission (Proceeds from the sale of non-living collections are to be used consistent with the established standards of the SDHC's discipline, but in no event shall they be used for anything other than acquisition or direct care of collections.);
- the unique and special nature of human remains and funerary and sacred objects is recognized as the basis of all decisions concerning such collections;
- collections-related activities promote the public good rather than individual financial gain; and
- competing claims of ownership that may be asserted in connection with objects in its custody should be handled openly, seriously, responsively and with respect for the dignity of all parties involved.

IV. ACQUISITION

The SDHC shall acquire artifacts, books, archival materials, and artwork to be accessioned into the permanent collection by gift, bequest, exchange, or purchase. The SDHC shall also accept donations of reproduction items to support and further its educational objectives. All items shall be considered as part of the permanent collection.

A. Criteria

Collection materials must meet the following criteria before being acquired by the SDHC:

1. The acquisition must conform to the SDHC's mission and collecting objectives. The item must also have a potential use for exhibitions, public programming, education, or research.
2. The present owner must be willing to declare in writing that he/she has clear title.
3. Acquisitions shall be by gift, bequest, exchange, or purchase.
4. The possibility of major future expenses, such as conservation, maintenance or storage, shall be considered.
5. The SDHC must be in a position to provide proper care for the proposed acquisition. The item must also be free of any hazardous or potentially hazardous materials.
6. The historical significance of the artifact should be provided by the donor and established by a member of the Archives & Collections Committee (ACC) or a member of the SDHC Board.

7. The artifact's provenance should, if possible, be documented by the donor. If the donor cannot document provenance to the ACC's satisfaction, and if the ACC retains an interest in the item, the ACC will report the current state of item provenance to the Board, who will make a final determination on whether further provenance research is required before the accession can be approved. The ACC shall carry out any requested research.
8. Moral, legal, and ethical implications of the acquisition will be considered.
9. No acquisition will be accepted unless accompanied by full literary rights, property rights, copyrights, patents trademarks or trade names. Any exception to this must be approved by the Board of the SDHC.
10. Acquisitions must be free from any donor-imposed restriction.

B. Procedures

1. Gift

- a. The ACC shall temporarily receive the item(s) that meet the acquisition criteria. Appraisals are encouraged, but not mandatory, and will be the responsibility of the donor.
- b. The ACC shall oversee a properly-executed Deed of Gift for the donation, which includes the donor's contact information and signature over a clear statement of intent to donate.
- c. The ACC shall formally acknowledge all items which are accepted into the collection.
- d. The ACC shall keep all records documenting gifts.

2. Bequest

- a. The ACC may receive artifacts by bequest if the item(s) meets the acquisition criteria.
- b. The ACC shall be responsible for all negotiations with executors and/or representative law firms. Any forms pertaining to the bequest shall include the executor and/or representative law firm's contact information and signature over a clear statement of intent to donate the bequested items on behalf of the deceased.
- c. The ACC shall make final approval of all offered items.
- d. The ACC shall keep all records documenting all bequests with duplicate records stored off-site.

3. Exchange

- a. The ACC may make a recommendation in writing for the exchange of SDHC artifacts with another center or society. Such center or society must be able to properly care for the proffered item(s) and must collect items of that type. The recommendation shall specify what item(s) SDHC shall offer, the item(s) to be gained in return and the reasons for

the exchange. The recommendation must also provide proof that SDHC legally owns the proposed item(s) to be exchanged. Such item(s) must meet the criteria for deaccession.

- b. A statement from the proposed center or society must also be included, which proves full legal ownership of the proffered item(s).
- c. The recommendation shall be presented by the Board of the SDHC for final approval.
- d. The ACC shall carry out the transaction.
- e. The ACC shall keep all records documenting all exchanges with duplicate records stored off-site. The records shall include the exchanging institution's contact information and signature over a clear statement of intent to exchange the item(s).

C. Found in Collection

Any item discovered in the collection lacking any documentation as to how it was acquired, and lacking any evidence that someone else owns the item can be considered found in the collection. The absence of such documentation supports a presumption that the ownership was transferred to SDHC at the time of acquisition. The SDHC may consider the item as its own unless someone can overcome this presumption by providing evidence proving clear title to the item. Legal counsel may be consulted before items of unconfirmed ownership are recommended for disposal.

D. "Front Desk" Donations

The Museum Disposition of Property Act (1992) states that undocumented property left on museum premises/unsolicited automatically becomes property of the museum (Sec. 11.1.c)

If an item is left at an SDHC property outside of normal business hours, the SDHC will document information about the artifact. The ACC will evaluate the item as an unconditional donation.

V. LOANS

Both incoming and outgoing loans are a means of enhancing the permanent collection and the reputation of SDHC. Loans, however, shall only be made to a cultural organization, museum, or center, after careful consideration regarding the condition and stability of the item(s) to be lent, and the ability of the borrowing organization to provide proper care, environment, and security. Loans are for exhibit and research purposes only, and only for a period not to exceed three (3) months. The loan may be renewed at the end of the term at the discretion of the Board of the SDHC. At all times the preservation of the item(s) shall take priority.

A. Incoming Loans

Incoming Loans shall be accepted from individuals or institutions for purposes of exhibition or current research at the SDHC. Exceptions to this rule may be authorized by the Board of the SDHC in the case of extremely important pieces or collections.

1. Incoming Loan Criteria

- a. Anyone offering item(s) for loan must be willing to declare in writing that he/she is the legal owner.
- b. The duration of the loan shall be for a specified period of time, for example, not to exceed three (3) months.
- c. The loan may be terminated by either party, 14 days after notification by certified mail.
- d. The Lender is responsible for notifying the ACC of any change of address.
- e. All loans shall receive the same care as collections belonging to the SDHC. They shall not be cleaned, repaired, altered, re-matted, or remounted unless authorized in writing by the Lender. No conservation work shall be done on borrowed item(s) unless there is an emergency, and the item(s) require immediate treatment to prevent further damage or complete destruction. In this event, an ACC member shall make every effort to obtain verbal permission before treatment is begun and shall request written confirmation from the Lender.
- f. The History Center shall provide insurance coverage for the item(s) based on appraisal figures supplied by the Lender, unless insurance is waived in writing by the Lender, and a waiver of subrogation is obtained by the Lender.
- g. Packing and transportation to and from the SDHC shall be negotiated by the SDHC and the Lender.
- h. The Lender shall agree to the governing conditions stated on the SDHC Incoming Loan Form. By signing the loan form, the Lender indicates his/her confidence that the loaned item(s) can withstand travel, climate changes, and the circumstances of the exhibition.

2. Incoming Loan Procedures

- a. The ACC may initiate a loan from a private individual, Society or History Center at least two (2) months prior to the proposed starting date of the loan.
- b. The ACC shall have in writing a report identifying the proposed item(s) and justification for the loan. (See the Museum Disposition and Property Act (1992), Sec. 3 for the necessary information to be collected by the museum)
- c. Loans must be contracted for by written agreements between the ACC and the Lender.
- d. The ACC Chairman may be responsible for the loan transaction including transportation and insurance, and shall maintain all records with duplicate records stored off-site.

B. Outgoing Loans

All outgoing loans of any item from the SDHC's permanent collection must meet the following criteria:

1. Outgoing Loan Criteria

- a. The borrowing institution must provide a certificate of insurance for the borrowed item(s). The coverage must be in effect for the duration of the loan including transit to and from the borrowing institution and while on the Borrower's premises.
- b. The ACC must feel confident that the borrowing institution can properly care for the borrowed item(s) including providing suitable climate control, theft, and fire protection, and that the item(s) can withstand the effect of travel, climate changes, and exhibition.
- c. Any damage, breakage, or loss shall be reported immediately. The reason for the loan request must be stated and deemed satisfactory by the Board of the Saugatuck/Douglas History Center.
- d. No cleaning or repair work shall be done on any borrowed item(s) without the express written permission of the ACC. The only exception is if, in an emergency, an item(s) requires immediate conservation treatment to prevent further damage or complete destruction. In that event, the Borrower shall make every effort to obtain verbal permission from the ACC prior to beginning treatment. Written confirmation shall be provided.
- e. Borrowed item(s) placed on exhibition shall be labeled, "Courtesy of the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center" in all appropriate labels and press releases.
- f. Transportation shall be provided by SDHC staff unless otherwise arranged.
- g. Packing and transportation costs shall be defrayed by the Borrower.
- h. The borrowed item(s) shall not be photographed or reproduced in any form without the express written permission of the ACC.
- i. The duration of the loan shall be for a specific period of time, not to exceed three (3) months. The loan may be renewed at the end of the term at the discretion of the Board of the SDHC.
- j. The History Center reserves the right to terminate a loan after notifying the borrower by certified mail.
- k. Borrowed item(s) shall not be used for any commercial purposes without the express written permission of the Board of the SDHC.
- l. No borrowed item(s) shall be loaned to another institution without the express written permission of the Board of the SDHC.
- m. Packing for return shipping must be in the same manner and means as the original shipping.
- n. Only persons approved by the SDHC shall be permitted to handle, move or pack and unpack the borrowed item(s).
- o. The History Center reserves the right to inspect the loaned item(s) on the premises of the Borrower during regular gallery hours.

- p. Even if the above conditions are met, loan requests may be denied if, in the opinion of the ACC, the request is not in the best interest of the item.
- q. The Borrower shall agree to the loan governing conditions stated on the SDHC's outgoing loan form.

2. Outgoing Loan Procedures

- a. Written requests for the loan of any item must be received within sixty (60) days prior to the proposed date of the loan. Requests shall be addressed to the ACC.
- b. The ACC shall initiate dialogue with the borrowing institution to determine if the institution will be able to meet the loan criteria.
- c. The ACC shall examine the item(s) and recommend in writing which item(s) is suitable for loan.
- d. The ACC shall grant final approval for all loans. The ACC shall make a written condition report before the loan goes out.
- e. The ACC shall be responsible for the loan transaction including packing and transportation, and shall maintain all records with duplicate records stored off-site.

3. Unclaimed Loaned Items

All items placed in the care of the ACC that are not on loan or have not be accessioned into the collection may, after reasonable attempts to contact the owner(s), be disposed of in accordance with The Museum Disposition Property Act (1992), if the owner(s) has not responded to the SDHC correspondence within a ninety (90) day period.

If SDHC records do not indicate the name and contact information of an owner(s), the SDHC shall make a reasonable attempt to send out information through appropriate networks that an item is available to be claimed, upon which any potential claimant(s) must prove conclusively that they (a) left the item in the custody of the SDHC and (b) had legal authority to do so when the item was left in custody. If no claimant(s) come forward within a ninety (90) day period, SDHC may dispose of the item in accordance with The Museum Disposition Property Act (1992).

VI. DEACCESSION

Deaccessioning is the process of permanently removing from the collection accessioned item(s) for the purpose of advancing SDHC's mission through enhancement of the collection. The deaccession process shall be cautious, deliberate, and scrupulous. No individual associated with SDHC or the Board of the SDHC or their representatives shall receive deaccessioned item(s) nor personally profit from the deaccessioning process.

A. Deaccession Criteria

Society item(s) to be considered for deaccession must meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. The item(s) is no longer relevant and useful to the collection objectives, activities, or programming of the SDHC.
2. The item(s) no longer fits the stated mission statement of the SDHC.
3. The item(s) has failed to retain its identity or authenticity.
4. The item(s) has deteriorated beyond the SDHC's ability and resources to preserve it.
5. The item(s) is missing parts or pieces vital to its historical context, and such pieces cannot be found elsewhere.
6. A need exists to eliminate redundant collections items.

B. Deaccession Procedures

Before an item is recommended for deaccessioning, it shall be determined that the SDHC fully and legally owns the item(s). The SDHC shall utilize the following procedures for deaccessioning:

1. The ACC or the Board of the SDHC may singly or jointly apply the above deaccessioning criteria; however, the Board is solely responsible for final approval of all deaccessions.
2. The ACC shall maintain all records documenting all deaccessions.

VII. INSURANCE

The SDHC shall cover suitable coverage for theft, fire, and damage based on a current appraisal of the collections or parts of it so far as is possible. These shall be decided by the Board in consultation with appropriate consultants. Existing policies will be reviewed annually by the ACC and an insurance agent and changes shall be approved by the Board. The ACC shall maintain these records with duplicate records stored off-site. Any deviations from established insurance policies shall be authorized by the Board.

VIII. INVENTORY

To properly maintain and manage its holdings at SDHC facilities and any off-site storage areas, a staff member(s) of the ACC or their designee shall establish an inventory of the Collection and shall periodically confirm its accuracy. A collections inventory is the identification and/or quantification of the physical collection, as well as a review of the attendant documentation. Items unaccounted for shall be brought to the attention of the Board of the Saugatuck-Douglas History Center and so noted

in the Accession files. Sufficient data shall be maintained to permit an individual to fully identify and locate any item from the automated record.

IX. CARE OF THE COLLECTION

The SDHC will support and promote goals for collections care as stated in the AAM Code of Ethics. Awareness of responsibility for collections care will be incorporated into all SDHC activities. All activities involving collections will incorporate and maintain the policies and procedures adopted for care and preservation.

A. Staff

1. To ensure the safety of the collection, only trained and authorized staff/volunteers may handle items and item records, and authorized staff/volunteers must maintain an awareness of standards for the proper care of collections.
2. A knowledge of basic handling guidelines for items or archival materials is required of anyone given access to collections.
3. All collections are to be properly supported and housed while in storage, on exhibit, or in transit.
4. An effort shall be made to photograph each item in the collection for purposes of identification, condition, and reference, and all incoming loans shall be photographed immediately upon arrival.
5. Authorized staff/volunteers will oversee the packing and shipping of items that enter or leave SDHC premises, according to SDHC standards for packing and shipping.

B. Protection

It is the Board's responsibility to ensure that the collections, whether on exhibition or in storage, are adequately protected from fire, theft, vandalism, and natural disaster, harmful light temperature extremes, or humidity. The Board shall establish procedures for handling these emergency situations.

C. Conservation

Conservation is essential to the stewardship of SDHC's collection and responds directly to the Mission to preserve the rich historical and cultural heritage of the Saugatuck, Douglas, Saugatuck Township and vicinity. The care and expansion of the collection make conservation of items an ongoing responsibility. It is the ACC's responsibility to monitor the condition of the collections and recommend item(s) in need of conservation. Professional conservation will be sought at the discretion of the ACC and subject to available funds.

X. ACCESS TO THE COLLECTIONS AND RECORDS

As a public institution whose stated mission is to advance and disseminate knowledge about the history of the Saugatuck-Douglas community, SDHC accepts as a guiding principle the responsibility and opportunity of providing the public access to the collection in its trust. Access to the Collection is encouraged through exhibitions, publications, SDHC's website, and other SDHC programming. Collections not on exhibit shall be made available for scholarly research upon request, and the Collection shall not be open for general browsing. Requests for access must be received in advance, be specific in nature, and be addressed to the ACC. All instances of Collections access will be recorded.

In certain instances, factors such as resource limitations, security, intellectual property restrictions, and collections care requirements may constrain physical access to the collection, and in such instances, the researcher shall be informed of the restrictions, and the best effort shall be made by a designated member of the ACC to determine if another, non-restricted collections item(s) will be useful for the completion of research, or if another area repository provides access to appropriate research material.

Over the course of research, the Board of Trustees reserves the right to charge the researcher to defray costs of any record reproduction work the researcher requests. The History Center will only allow reproduction of records for which SDHC has clear title, where no known privacy issues will be violated, and for which no known intellectual property or copyright restrictions apply.

XI. RECORDS

The maintenance of accurate records on the acquisition, identification, location, and disposition of collection and loan materials is a major responsibility of SDHC, and as such the ACC shall initiate and maintain all records pertaining to the item(s) coming into or leaving the Collection. The ACC shall be responsible for ensuring that an item(s) bears an accession number linking the item(s) to its official record.

Records maintained on each item shall be organized into two categories: Collections and Curatorial. Collections Records include records that are commonly associated with registration and collections management functions, while Curatorial Records provide a broad body of information establishing the item's historical significance and cultural context. Examples of relevant records in each category include, if applicable to the item:

1. Collections Records

1. Temporary receipts for donation
2. Deed of Gift
3. Negotiations regarding bequests

4. Accession records
5. Recommendations for exchange/exchange agreements
6. Recommendations for loan/loan agreements – including item(s) movement history
7. Recommendations for deaccessioning/deaccession transactions and disputation
8. Appraisals
9. Item location and activity history
10. Records of conservation work
11. Correspondence regarding item(s)
12. Tax documents
13. Transfer of rights documents
14. Photographs
15. Customs documents

2. Curatorial Records

1. Provenance records, tracing the chain of item ownership as far back as possible
2. Historical Research, derived from primary or secondary historical sources
3. Exhibition History of the item(s) – If the item has been previously exhibited, where was it exhibited? When? In what exhibition?
4. Relevant public records detailing historical information or context (auction catalog description, estate sale information, exhibition labels)

Collections records shall be made in a timely manner, housed in a secure location, and physically preserved by proper handling and storage methods. Duplicate records shall be stored off-site as a security precaution.

XII. PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

This policy will serve as the official document governing the management of all of the collections of the SDHC upon approval by the Board of the SDHC. It will be the responsibility of the ACC to review the contents of this policy every five (5) years, or more frequently at the discretion of the Board, to make sure that it is serving the SDHC's mission and to recommend revisions for Board approval. A copy shall be made available to any donor or prospective donor upon request.

Approved by the SDHS Board of Directors October 21, 2014;

revised October 14, 2020;
revised June 14, 2023.