

Delaware Historical Society Collections Policy

Overview & Purpose of the Collections Policy

The Delaware Historical Society (DHS) was founded in 1864 to research, document, and share the history of the First State and fulfills the collecting function of its mission by acquiring artifacts, printed materials, manuscripts, audio-visual materials and electronic media that relate to Delaware, its history, and its people. By acquiring these items, the DHS accepts the responsibility to manage and care for them in the public trust.

This Collections Policy is intended to be used in conjunction with the Collection Procedures Manual and Collections Plan, and seeks to ensure that all collections-related activities meet current professional standards for the preservation and care of historic materials and that the policies and procedures of the Society are in compliance with local, state, and federal laws governing the ownership and transfer of these materials. This policy only applies to objects coming into the permanent collection. The DHS follows the standard practices and codes of ethics of the Society of American Archivists and American Association of Museums.

The DHS Collections Policy is subject to future review and alteration to keep pace with evolving professional standards. Any necessary changes will be identified and made by the collections staff, presented to the Collections Committee, and approved by the Board of Trustees in a timely manner.

Mission Statement

The Delaware Historical Society is the statewide, non-profit organization that explores, preserves, shares, and promotes Delaware history, heritage, and culture to strengthen our community.

Collections Committee

Composition

The DHS Collections Committee is a Standing Committee of the Board of Trustees. The committee consists of Board members appointed by the President, who all have voting privileges, and three (3) ex-officio (non-voting) members, who serve as advisors. The ex-officio members are the President of the Board of Trustees, the Chief Executive Officer, and the Chief Curator. All members of the DHS Collections Committee must be members of DHS. The committee may also include non-board member content experts, who would provide advice and assistance for special projects and other collections-related issues. Voting members should always outnumber non-board members.

Role

The Collections Committee will provide oversight on all matters relating to the acquisition, development, care, use, and management of the DHS collections. It shall cooperate with other committees in all DHS endeavors. Approval of the Chair of the Collections Committee is required for purchases above one thousand (\$1000.00) dollars. Approval of the full committee is required for purchases above two thousand (\$2000.00) dollars.

The Committee shall:

- Be an advocate of a well funded acquisitions budget that allows the DHS to meet its goals.
- Work with staff to develop successful relationships with potential donors to the collections, including individuals, collectors, businesses, dealers, estate executors, other collecting organizations, and other sources.
- Assist staff in identifying potential funding sources for acquisitions and conservation and take an active role in decisions regarding purchases for the collections using acquisitions funds.
- Be familiar with, and prepared to provide guidance on, collections-related issues and possible future avenues of collecting for the institution.
- Be familiar with the balance of funds in any dedicated acquisition account.
- Prepare and circulate detailed minutes of each meeting to members of the committee and keep the Board of Trustees informed on all collections-related matters.
- Review and formally approve a quarterly list of accessions provided by collections staff.
- Review and approve all deaccessions and present them to the full Board of Trustees for final approval.

The Collections

The DHS collects for the Museum, the Read House and Gardens, and the Library and seeks to acquire materials with a documented association to some aspect of Delaware's history from pre-history until the present day.

Museum Collections

Items accepted for the Museum collection must have a documented connection to the history of Delaware and its people. DHS does not collect natural history specimens, live ammunition, or archaeological material not related to DHS sites. The collection of the Read House and Gardens is considered part of the DHS Museum collection, but because of the largely interpretive function of the site, its collecting focus is slightly broader (see next section). Materials collected include, but are not limited to:

- clothing, uniforms, and textiles
- fine, decorative, and folk arts
- tools and equipment
- household and domestic items

- furniture
- toys
- architectural elements
- industrial and business-related items

Collections at the Read House and Gardens

The Read House and Gardens is a historic site comprised of a historic house and two-and-one-half surrounding acres on the Delaware River in Historic New Castle. This site is a medium for exploring Delaware history, using the owners and residents of the property as a lens for understanding interpretive themes that focus on household dynamics, gentility and style, surrounding community influences, and the impact of broader historical events and movements. Inside the historic house, interpretive emphasis is placed on the three families, the Reads, the Coupers, and the Lairds, who occupied the house during most of its history. Materials collected for the house are selectively acquired based upon surviving documentation from the occupants and an established furnishings plan that follows an interpretive framework. As such, materials acquired for the house and gardens may come from outside Delaware but their acquisition must be supported by documentary evidence. Materials collected include, but are not limited to:

- furniture
- domestic and household items
- clothing and textiles
- fine and decorative arts items
- archaeological material excavated from the Read House grounds

Library Collections

Items accepted for the library collections must have a documented connection to the history of Delaware and its people. The library also selectively acquires some historical and genealogical material from the states surrounding Delaware, as well as some national material, in order to provide a broader context for research. Materials collected include, but are not limited to:

- printed material on Delaware history, genealogy, and biography
- 2-dimensional material made or printed in Delaware
- manuscripts and archival records of Delaware organizations, businesses, & individuals
- ephemera
- maps
- postcards
- photographs
- audio-visual items
- Delaware newspapers
- electronic and web-based resources

Purpose and Use of the Collections

The Museum, Read House and Gardens, and Library collections are preserved and maintained by the Society in perpetuity to further its mission and institutional goals and may only be used in the following manner:

- exhibition
- loans to other museums and educational or cultural institutions
- study, research, publication, or other educational purposes
- publication of scholarly and promotional materials by DHS

The collections may not be used for any purpose that does not further DHS's institutional mission and goals. Inappropriate uses for the collection include, but are not limited to:

- Use of objects as props or personal decoration in an individual's home or place of business
- Use of objects at non-DHS social functions or events
- Use of accessioned objects in educational programming that would subject them to excessive handling and therefore possible deterioration and damage.

When there is any doubt or question, appropriate or inappropriate use will be determined by the Chief Curator, Chief Program Officer or, if necessary, the Chief Executive Officer.

Acquisitions

DHS collects material that is consistent with its mission to explore, document, preserve, and appreciate the history of Delaware. Potential acquisitions will only be accepted if the material directly supports this mission. DHS uses the following criteria in determining possible acquisitions:

- Items must have a documented association with Delaware individuals, buildings, businesses, or organizations; or have been made or printed in Delaware and clearly marked as such if there is no documented provenance.
- In the case of the Read House and Gardens, material from outside Delaware may be collected if it is a typical example of something that one of the families might have owned or used. Any such acquisitions must be carefully considered on a case-by-case basis with reference to existing documentary evidence and the interpretive plan.
- Items may be collected if they are typical examples of items made or used in Delaware and this association is clearly established through scholarly research or publications.
- Items must not excessively duplicate material already in the Society's collection.
- Material collected must be in stable condition, or be able to be stabilized without undue expense.
- DHS must be able to provide adequate ongoing professional care for the item that will not compromise its ability to care for other parts of its collection.

Terms & Conditions of Acceptance

- The owner of the item must have clear and legal title to the item and offer it unconditionally and without restrictions before DHS will consider accepting it. Clear title will be transferred to DHS with the acquisition.
- Items accepted must also meet legal and ethical collecting guidelines established by the American Association of Museums and the Society of American Archivists. DHS will not knowingly or willfully accept any material when evidence exists that it has been stolen, looted, or illegally imported.

Acquisition Methods

DHS acquires objects for its collections through donations, purchases, bequests, or transfers. DHS staff and Board members are not permitted to provide a financial appraisal of any potential donations. The donor is responsible for obtaining an independent appraisal of the material prior to making the donation.

Donations

DHS accepts donations to its Museum, Read House and Gardens, and Library collections if they meet the established acceptance criteria for new acquisitions. The following shall apply to all donations accepted for the collection:

- A Deed of Gift acknowledging transfer of title will be issued for all materials acquired by donation. Collections staff responsible for processing donations must file a copy of the Deed of Gift in each accession folder.

Purchases

Purchases for the collections shall be made from income from specially designated funds, current budget allocations, or specially designated monetary gifts. The following shall apply to all objects purchased for the collection:

- Anyone may make suggestions with regard to purchases for the collections.
- The Chief Curator may authorize the purchase of items for the collection up to five hundred (\$500.00) dollars for the Museum and Library Collections. The Chief Program Officer will work in conjunction with the Curator of Objects and Chief Curator with regard to purchases for the Read House and Gardens up to five hundred (\$500.00) dollars. The approval of the Chief Executive Officer is required for purchases between five hundred (\$500.00) and one thousand (\$1000.00) dollars.
- Approval of the Chair of the Collections Committee is required for purchases above one thousand (\$1000.00) dollars. Approval of the full committee is required for purchases above two thousand (\$2000.00) dollars.
- The bill of sale shall constitute transfer of title for purchased items and will be filed in the accession folder along with supporting documentation.

Bequests

DHS encourages bequests but reserves the right to renounce its interest in property bequeathed to the Society under a testamentary instrument. Bequests must meet DHS acceptance criteria for new acquisitions. Any renunciation of interest must take place within six (6) months after the official notification of the bequest. The following shall apply to all accepted bequests:

- A copy of the donor's will and testament will be maintained in the accession folder in lieu of a Deed of Gift.
- Materials donated by an executor from an estate that are not specified in a will are to be treated as a donation from the estate rather than as a bequest.

Transfers

DHS may accept materials acquired by transfer from the collection of another institution.

Materials Found in Collection

Materials defined as "found in collection" are considered part of the Society's collection but lack documentation or clear provenance. Any such items shall become property of DHS if they have a documented history of being in the DHS collection for five (5) years or longer and reasonable documented attempts to track down the donor have been unsuccessful. DHS may use these items for research and exhibit purposes while possible ownership is being researched. All efforts to establish the source of the materials will be documented in the accessions file.

Deaccessioning & Disposition

The permanent removal of items from the DHS collections through deaccessioning is permitted but it must be understood that this action has legal, ethical, and financial ramifications that the collections staff, Chief Executive Officer, and Board of Trustees must take into consideration. Review of the collections is an ongoing process and deaccessioning should take place on an item-by-item basis and always with reference to the DHS Mission, Collections Policy, and institutional Collecting Plan. This policy does not apply to the weeding and disposal of duplicate, out-of-scope, and irrelevant archival material that is standard practice as part of archival processing. Collections items may be considered for deaccessioning based on the following criteria:

- The material falls outside the scope of the acquisitions criteria or does not support the DHS mission.
- The material is a duplicate or excessively redundant copy of material already in the collection.
- DHS has acquired an example of the material that is in better condition and/or has better provenance.
- The item has deteriorated beyond a point where it can be reasonably conserved.
- DHS can no longer properly maintain and care for the material according to current professional standards.

- The material threatens the health or safety of staff, visitors, or other collections items and this condition cannot be remedied.

Deaccessioning Process

- Collections staff may propose material as a candidate for deaccessioning. Recommendations and the possible reasons for deaccessioning shall then be discussed within the appropriate department.
- The Chief Curator or Curator of Objects, working in conjunction with the Chief Program Officer for the Read House and Gardens, will submit a written recommendation with relevant reasons for deaccessioning to the Chief Executive Officer, who then presents it to the Collections Committee for review.
- The Collections Committee shall review and present the recommendations to the Full Board for discussion.
- Full Board approval is required before any collections material may be deaccessioned. Any rejected recommendation may be discussed at a subsequent meeting.

Disposition

- When deaccessioned materials are of historic value, DHS will make every effort to place them with another museum or collecting institution where the material will be accessible to the public.
- In certain circumstances, deaccessioned materials may be offered to the DHS Education Department for use in programming if it can be clearly established that the items fill a specific need. However, possible usefulness in educational programming shall never be proposed or accepted as the sole reason for deaccessioning.
- If possible, DHS will attempt to return deaccessioned materials to the donor. If the donor cannot be contacted after good faith efforts to do so have been made, items may be sold or destroyed.
- DHS reserves the right to destroy deaccessioned material that is deemed extremely deteriorated or a health hazard.
- Proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned Museum, Read House and Gardens, or Library collections must only be deposited in accounts designated for acquisition or conservation.
- Deaccessioned materials will not be traded with, sold, or otherwise knowingly acquired by DHS employees, board members, collections committee members, or their representatives.
- Deaccessioned materials destined for sale must only be sold at venues to which the general public has access, such as, but not limited to, public auctions.

Record Keeping

All records pertaining to deaccessioned material will be marked “deaccessioned” along with the date of deaccessioning. The Curator of Objects will maintain these records for the Museum and Read House and Gardens and the Chief Curator will maintain them for the Library.

Loans

DHS loans out and accepts loans of material on a temporary basis to support its mission and broaden public awareness of its collections. DHS does not usually accept long term loans nor does it offer materials from its collection for permanent or indefinite loan. Exceptions to this policy must be discussed and approved by the Collections Committee. Loan policies are designed to ensure the safety of all loaned items.

Outgoing Loans

DHS materials may be placed on loan for the following reasons:

- exhibition
- conservation
- research, examination, or identification
- documentation and publication

DHS collection items will only be loaned to qualifying institutions and conservators that meet professional museum standards for collections care. Collections items will not be loaned to individuals for private use. Any possible exceptions to DHS's outgoing loan policy must be approved by the Chief Curator in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer, who has the final authority. The status of existing loans will be monitored, documented, and processed by the Curator of Objects.

Terms & Conditions for Outgoing Loans

- All loan requests or renewals will be evaluated on an individual basis and may be accepted or declined by DHS for the following reasons:
 - prior commitment to use of the material in a DHS exhibit
 - condition of the material
 - length of loan period
 - state of the exhibition space or environmental conditions at the borrowing facility
 - other considerations as warranted
- The borrowing institution may not undertake any cleaning or restoration work without the express written permission of DHS.
- The borrowing institution is responsible for monitoring the condition of each item for the duration of the loan.
- Borrowing institutions must provide proof of adequate insurance.
- The borrower will credit DHS as the owner of the material on exhibit labels and on any associated exhibit literature.
- Approval of any outgoing loan does not include rights to reproduce, publish, or distribute images of DHS material. The borrowing institution must obtain DHS written permission before any photography, scanning, uploading to the internet, or publication can be undertaken. DHS does not grant rights to exclusive use and reserves the right to publish copies of material from its collections or authorize others to do so.

- The maximum loan period for DHS collection items is one year. Any extensions/renewals must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- DHS reserves the right to recall items on loan at any time.

Incoming Loans

DHS may borrow material from individuals or other institutions for the following reasons:

- exhibition
- research, examination, or identification
- documentation and publication

Items will be borrowed primarily for temporary (up to one year) exhibition purposes and will be returned to their owners in a timely manner at the close of an exhibition. In accepting materials on loan, DHS agrees to treat them with the same professional care and consideration that it applies to its own collection and will not attempt to borrow items deemed too fragile to withstand handling and transportation. The Curator of Objects and, if necessary, the Chief Executive Officer, is responsible for initiating all incoming loans for museum exhibits. The Curator of Objects will monitor, document, and coordinate the necessary logistics and incoming loan paperwork.

Terms & Conditions for Incoming Loans

- It is the responsibility of the lender to notify DHS promptly and in writing if there is any change of address or ownership with regard to materials on loan.
- If the lender chooses to maintain his/her own insurance, DHS must be furnished with a certificate of insurance from the lender's insurance company that names DHS as the additional insured or waiving subrogation against the Society. Failure to do so will constitute a release of DHS from any liability and all claims arising out of loss or damage.
- The lender will agree that, in the event of a claim, recovery will be limited to the amount paid by the insurer.

Access to the Collections

General Guidelines

DHS is committed to providing public access to the Museum, Read House and Gardens, and Library collections through exhibitions, research activities, public programming, and publications. The collections are available to scholars and the public for research purposes except where restricted. Procedures and rules for public access are intended to balance the demands of patron access with responsible practices that support the long-term preservation of the objects. As such, all researchers shall be granted reasonable access in accordance with procedures necessary to safeguard the materials and restrictions imposed by open hours, exhibition demands, available study space, and staff time. DHS collections staff are responsible

for managing public access to the collections and reserve the right to control or restrict access if, in their best judgment, the safety of the objects will be compromised in any way.

Guidelines for Reproduction & Publication of Collection Materials

No photographic, digital, or replica reproduction is permitted without the written permission of DHS. Reproduction and publication permission requests must be submitted in writing and DHS reserves the right to collect fees and control the use of its items as may be deemed appropriate and lawful.

Guidelines for Use of the Museum Collections

- Public access to the museum collections is provided through changing exhibits, tours, and educational programs during normal operating hours.
- Access to museum collections in storage and at the Read House and Gardens is provided at the discretion of the Curator of Objects, who will also consult with the Chief Program officer if necessary in the case of the Read House and Gardens. Visitors to storage areas and artifacts at the Read House and Gardens must observe the guidance of the Curator of Objects with regard to safe and appropriate object handling practices.
- No food, beverages, or smoking are permitted in any collections storage or exhibition areas, with the exception of official events and receptions held in Distinctively Delaware.
- The Curator of Objects reserves the right to take appropriate action if guidelines are not followed or inappropriate or destructive behavior is observed.
- Problems or disagreements with regard to access will be addressed by the Chief Curator, who has the final authority. The Chief Executive Officer will fulfill this role in the absence of the Chief Curator.

Guidelines for Collections Use at the Read House and Gardens

Because of the largely interpretive function of the site, objects at the Read House and Gardens currently fall into two categories: the artifact collection and the education collection:

- a) The artifact collection consists of authentic historical artifacts that have been formally accessioned and are considered part of DHS's museum collection. These objects will have a three-part accession number applied and must only be used for exhibit purposes in the period rooms. The Curator of Objects is responsible for the care, handling, and tracking of these objects and reserves the right to remove them for conservation, exhibit, or storage purposes. Apart from the Curator of Objects, only guide staff with special training, known as Curatorial Assistants, are authorized to handle the collection for room cleaning and seasonal rearranging purposes. Collections-related duties performed by the Curatorial Assistants must be supervised by the Chief Program Officer of Curator of Objects. Any loss of, or damage to, these items must be reported to the Curator of Objects.
- b) The education collection consists of a variety of antique and vintage household items that were acquired to be used as props or for education programs. These items will have no accession numbers applied and are not considered part of the DHS museum collection. They may be

handled by all staff for programming purposes and are tracked and cared for by the Read House and Gardens education staff, not the Curator of Objects. The Curator of Objects is responsible for communicating the different handling guidelines and making sure they are understood. Where possible, education collection items must be stored separately from accessioned pieces to help avoid confusion about handling practices.

Guidelines for Collections Care during Special Events & Tours at the Read House and Gardens

- The Read House and Gardens is open to the public for guided tours during normal operating hours.
- The house may be used for special tours, programs, and events provided that these events support and benefit DHS and have been approved by the Chief Program Officer in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Program Officer will seek guidance from the Curator of Objects if there is any question about collection safety during a special program or event.
- Under no circumstances are visitors allowed to touch or handle artifacts without the express permission and supervision of the Curator of Objects or Chief Program Officer.
- Staff members may ask visitors to leave the tour if established guidelines are not followed or inappropriate or destructive behavior is observed.
- Food and beverages are only permitted in specially designated areas of the house where they are required in conjunction with events or specific programs. No food, beverages, or smoking are ever permitted in the front parlor, back parlor, housekeeper's office, pantry, southeast bedchamber, northeast bedchamber, southwest chamber, bathing room, nursery, servant's room, or Laird dining room.
- Problems or disagreements with regard to access will be addressed by the Chief Program Officer, who has the final authority. In his/her absence, this role will be taken by the Chief Executive Officer.

Guidelines for Use of the Library Collections

- The library is open to the public for research purposes during normal operating hours.
- The DHS library is a non-circulating library.
- All researchers must sign in for each visit and are required to abide by library's rules and regulations.
- Researchers may access collection materials through the card catalogue or database.
- Researchers may have unrestricted access to materials available on the main floor of the Reading Room. Only the Chief Curator, Curator of Printed Materials, or Curator of Images are authorized to remove material from storage areas or the balcony.
- Members of the general public are not permitted to enter library storage areas unless accompanied by an authorized member of the library collections staff, who must be present at all times.
- No food, beverages, or smoking are permitted in the library or storage areas.
- Access to library and archival materials is provided at the discretion of the Chief Curator, Curator of Printed Materials, or Curator of Images and researchers must follow their guidance with regard to appropriate handling of materials.

- Library collections staff reserve the right to take appropriate action if guidelines are not followed or inappropriate or destructive behavior is observed.
- Problems or disagreements with regard to access will be addressed by the Chief Curator, who has the final authority. The Chief Executive Officer will fulfill this role in the absence of the Chief Curator.

Collections Management & Care

Record-Keeping & Preservation

It is the responsibility of the DHS collections staff to document, preserve, and maintain the condition and integrity of the materials in its care. DHS will maintain all of its collections in accordance with recognized current professional standards in the museum and library fields. It is the responsibility of the collections staff to ensure that:

- All materials accepted for the Museum, Read House and Gardens, and Library collections will be documented, classified, and catalogued according to generally accepted library and museum practices.
- Every object accepted into the museum collection shall be numbered and photographed.
- Antique and vintage items used by the DHS Education Department for programming shall have no accession numbers applied and are not considered part of the museum collection. The tracking, management, and care of such objects shall be the responsibility of the DHS Education Department.
- DHS will make every effort to maintain the safest, most stable environment possible for objects in storage and on exhibit.
- Duplicate sets of collections records will be maintained off site.
- Periodic inventories will be conducted in all collections storage and exhibition areas. Spot-checking will occur annually and a complete inventory will be done every ten (10) years.
- If conservation work is required, collections staff shall engage the services of a professional conservator. Conservators selected should follow the American Institute of Conservation's *Code of Ethics and Guidelines of Practices*. All conservation work must be documented photographically and in writing.

Insurance

DHS will carry and maintain fine arts insurance coverage on its collections. This policy shall be renewed and, if necessary, updated annually.

Risk Management

DHS must take all the necessary precautions to secure its collections and maintain its buildings to reduce the risk of damage by fire, theft, vandalism, or natural disasters. In the event of an emergency, the safety of staff and visitors shall have priority over collections.

- All DHS buildings must receive twenty-four hour monitoring from an outside alarm company and be equipped with smoke, heat, fire, and motion detectors that are activated when the buildings are empty.
- All DHS collections storage areas must be kept locked or with restricted public access.
- The Chief Curator, Curator of Objects, and the Facilities Associate are the only staff members that have direct access to museum collections storage areas.
- The Chief Curator, Curator of Printed Materials, Curator of Images, and Facilities Associate are the only staff members that have direct access to library and archival collections storage areas.
- DHS shall maintain, review, and update a disaster preparedness plan and ensure that all staff receives the necessary training to carry it out.