

The Litchfield Historical Society **MUSEUM COLLECTIONS POLICY**

I - MISSION

The Litchfield Historical Society illuminates the rich and nationally-significant history of Litchfield, enabling each of us to construct meaning from the past for the present and future.

II - VISION

The Litchfield Historical Society brings people together to discover, experience, and share the many diverse stories that have made our community a distinctive place, now and over time. We value the fact that every individual adds something to the story of Litchfield and recognize that each of those stories is important to our collective understanding of our community.

III - ETHICS

Stewardship of collections entails the highest public trust and carries with it the presumption of rightful ownership, permanence, care, documentation, and accessibility. The Litchfield Historical Society must ensure that collections in its custody support its mission and public trust responsibilities and are protected, secure, unencumbered, cared for, and preserved. Collections in the Society's custody must be accounted for and documented with controlled access provided.

The Litchfield Historical Society must ensure that acquisition, disposal, and loan activities are conducted in a manner that respects the protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources and conforms to its mission and public trust responsibilities. The disposal of collections materials must be solely for the advancement of the Society's mission through the acquisition of new historical and cultural materials or the direct care of existing collections. Acquisition and disposal of any artifact shall be handled according to the procedures outlined in the Collections Policy.

IV. GENERAL POLICY

The Litchfield Historical Society, as a duly incorporated organization under the laws and statutes of the State of Connecticut, is the sole legal body designated to hold title to its collections.

As a steward of a public collection, the Litchfield Historical Society agrees to preserve its acquisitions for maximum longevity through accessioning, record keeping, proper handling, rotating exhibition, necessary conservation, and appropriate storage. The Historical Society is also responsible for the interpretation of its acquisitions by making

these objects available to scholars and to the general public; completing photographic service and research requests; developing exhibitions, publications, and web-based projects based on the collections; maintaining its permanent installations; and lending to other institutions.

The policy statements set forth herein are intended to serve as general guidelines for the Director, Curators, Collection Committees, and Board of Trustees. They may be modified or amended by the Board as situations and need require.

V. HISTORY OF THE COLLECTIONS

The Litchfield Historical Society is a private non-profit organization founded in 1856 to collect, preserve, and interpret the history of Litchfield, Connecticut. The Society owns and occupies three buildings that are integral to the architectural fabric of the town of Litchfield. The Noyes Memorial Building, constructed on Litchfield's green in 1901, is the only Beaux Arts building in town. The Tapping Reeve House (1774) and the Litchfield Law School (1784), the first law school in America, are National Historic Landmark sites and rank among the most historically important properties in Connecticut. In 2007, the Society completed construction on a fourth building, the Pamela Cunningham Copeland Curatorial Center, a collections storage building located behind the Tapping Reeve House.

The Society did not begin actively collecting until the 1890s when a new group of enthusiastic citizens revived the organization and began soliciting materials for donation. Until the late 1960s, the museum was staffed by supportive community members but with no professional training. The museum accessioned a wide variety of items including natural history specimens, an apiary collection, assorted pieces of national history, and objects associated with presidents and figureheads. Items of local history were also collected but it was not the only focus of the institution.

Over the past four decades, the collecting mission of the Historical Society has evolved and been refined. Today, the Society collects items with historical value or meaning significant to the institutional mission, with an emphasis on the history of the town of Litchfield from its founding to the present. The Society has deaccessioned and redistributed many of the now non-mission related collections to more appropriate institutions or offered the items at public auction. This process is continuing and is discussed further in Section X.

VI. COLLECTIONS CATEGORIES

A. Museum Collection

The museum collection consists of approximately 20,000 items. It consists of decorative arts objects; textiles and clothing, personal artifacts; quilts, coverlets, and blankets; household goods; furniture, clocks, trunks, and band boxes; samplers and needlework

pictures, most of which were made by students of the Litchfield Female Academy; flags; and military collections dating from the Revolutionary War through the Korean War. The Society also owns a fine collection of American paintings by such artists as Ralph Earl, John Vanderlyn, Gilbert Stuart, Ammi Phillips, Ezra Ames, Eastman Johnson, and George Catlin. There is also an extensive collection of portrait miniatures, many painted by local artist Anson Dickinson.

B. Helga J. Ingraham Memorial Library Collections

As of 1995, the year the Library's last preservation survey took place, the Library held 9,600 books; 25 serials; one newspaper title; 90 microfilm reels; 360 linear feet of manuscript items; 25 linear feet of archives; 25 maps; 100 posters; 500 photographs; 10 audiovisual items; 750 works of art on paper; 300 pamphlets; and 100 architectural drawings. Since 1995, though, the Library's collections have grown substantially, and the Historical Society's staff has arranged, described, and rehoused a significant percentage of its document collections as well as undertaken a project to create modern catalog records for publications. At the end of these grant and privately funded projects, staff will update these numbers.

C. Education Collection

The Historical Society has a small collection of reproduction materials that are maintained by the Curator of Education and used for school and public programming. Items may be donated directly to the Education Collection; the staff may also designate a possible acquisition as appropriate for the Education Collection, at which point the donor will be notified of the museum's intention. Items accessioned as part of the Education Collection still require Deed of Gifts, which will be housed in a separate folder in the accession file cabinet marked "Education Collection."

VII. COLLECTING GOALS

One of the strengths of the Historical Society's collection is that the object, archival, and library collections are deeply connected and interrelated. The institution would like to continue this pattern by enhancing existing collections of Litchfield related materials and subject matters such as Litchfield County furniture; portraits and photographs of Litchfield residents and local scenes; Litchfield Female Academy artwork, needlework, and archival materials; Litchfield Law School archival materials; objects created or manufactured in Litchfield; and archival documentation of local families, businesses, and civic organizations. The Curator of Collections and Curator of Library & Archives shall continue to work simultaneously to add collections which fully document the lives of Litchfield residents through a variety of material formats, and work to maintain an intellectual link between items that must be separated by physical form and descriptive standards.

This is not to be taken as an exclusive list of the Society's holdings as the collections touch on many facets of Litchfield history. In addition, because a collection appears on the short list above does not mean that the Society is not still actively collecting materials to add to an existing strength in the museum's collection. Items that would fall into the above list are still highly sought by the institution.

Keeping the strengths of collection in mind, the Society also seeks to improve collections in areas that are either currently not collected or contain only a slim representation of an event, business, organization, family, or trend. Below is a list of areas which the institution will seek to improve its holdings.

- Printed works by Litchfield Law School graduates
- Agriculture and dairy farm objects and archival materials
- Works created by Litchfield artists
- Educational institutions in Litchfield, both public and private
- Documentation of twentieth century Litchfield, including photography, business records, and personal papers
- Items related to working class residents, minorities, and racial diversity within the community
- Documentation of residents and businesses in Northfield, Bantam, Milton, East Litchfield and South Farms (prior to the establishment of Morris in 1859)
- Electronic formats--blogs, websites, news sites, and other electronic media created or maintained by Litchfield's citizens, organizations, and businesses

VIII. COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE

The Board of Trustees shall form a Collections Committee to oversee the library, archive, and museum collections. The Director, Curator of Collections, and Curator of Library & Archives will all participate on the Committee. The Committee Chair will be a representative of the Society's Board and the remaining committee shall be composed of representatives from the Board and the greater community who have an expertise or special interest in library, archive, or museum collections.

Recognizing that the collections are a critical component of the Society's mission, the Committee shall review and serve as reflective advocates for the development, preservation, and maintenance of the Society's collections. The committee shall meet quarterly, with the flexibility to call additional meetings when necessary. The roles and responsibilities of the Committee pertaining to the acquisition, disposal, and conservation of collection items are outlined in the sections below.

IX. ACQUISITION

Collections are acquired by the Society through purchase, gift, bequest, or exchange according to the procedures outlined below. The Curators will evaluate all potential purchases, gifts, bequests, and exchanges for authenticity, documentary importance, and

aesthetic quality. Outside consultation may be necessary in cases where authenticity cannot be reasonably determined.

The Committee Chair, or in case of absentia, the Director, will report all new purchases, gifts, bequests, and exchanges to the Board of Trustees at monthly Board meetings.

A. Purchases:

Items are purchased for the purposes of upgrading and enlarging the Society's collections by growing identified areas of strength and developing new collections as specific funding becomes available. Curators will propose all potential purchases to the Director, who is authorized to purchase items up to \$1,000.00 per item. All other purchases will be proposed by the Curators to the Director and then to the Collections Committee, who will then make a recommendation for action to the Board of Trustees. Votes on purchases requiring a quick decision will be made via e-mail. Collections goals should be the primary factor in determining whether or not to acquire an item. A clear warranty of title is necessary for purchasing new collections.

B. Gifts:

The Director, in agreement with the Curator of Collections and Curator of Library & Archives, may accept gifts from the public that fall within the collecting mission of the Historical Society. Items that may be tangential or duplicative will be presented to the Collections Committee at the next available meeting for discussion and approval. All items of a significant size or that may cause undue burden on the finances or physical structure of the Society require the approval of the Board of Trustees with a recommendation by the Director or Committee Chair.

Before accepting an object from a donor, the Society must ensure that it is receiving clear title. When a donor or vendor is unwilling or unable to document the provenance of an object, he or she must produce a bill of sale or a written statement describing the circumstances under which the object came into his or her possession, and also a disclaimer that he or she has no reason to believe that the title rests with another individual or institution. If clear title cannot be obtained, the object should not be accepted.

Approved donations become the unconditional and unrestricted property of the Litchfield Historical Society. The Litchfield Historical Society will make every effort to care for, preserve, research, exhibit, and credit the objects it adds to the collection appropriately. All donated object(s) are accessioned into the collection and become available for public display, research, publication, and photography.

The Historical Society upholds the 1978 Copyright Law (Pub. L. 94-553 of Title 17 of the United States Code). The Society makes effort to secure the copyright of all objects in the collections created and donated prior to January 1, 1978.

The Deed of Gift form transfers the copyright as well as the title of an object from the donor to the Litchfield Historical Society unless otherwise specifically stated on the form. All efforts will be made, by the appropriate staff member, to clear the copyright for all objects acquired after January 1, 1978 if a Deed of Gift is not present in the Accession File.¹

The Society's museum collection only accepts unrestricted gifts. However, it is understandable that because of the sensitive nature of some materials, some temporary restrictions may be in order for library and archive collections. Any such restrictions should be spelled out carefully in writing, with specific time limits established.

The Society reserves the right to reject objects of insufficient quality, duplicates, irrelevant or insignificant material, or objects of a size or condition that would otherwise cause undue burden to the Society's resources. When rejecting offers, the Society may recommend other institutions where such objects may be placed. Unsolicited donations of such materials will be returned to the donor. If the donor has abandoned property without leaving their personal information, the Society will follow the current legal procedures regarding abandoned property in the State of Connecticut to return the items to the donor, find a more appropriate repository for the items, or dispose of the items (see Section VIII below).

In certain instances, conserving and storing objects may cause the Society an undue financial burden. In these cases, the Society should attempt to solicit funds from the donor, or from an alternate source, for the conservation or maintenance of the objects.

Appraisal of gifts must conform to current laws governing donations to non-profit institutions. Internal Revenue Service regulations prevent staff and Board members of the Litchfield Historical Society from acting as an appraiser for tax evaluations. The donor is responsible for obtaining an appraisal if needed. Ethically, the Society should not recommend appraisers, but staff will provide a list of qualified appraisers

C. Bequests:

Bequests follow the same general guidelines as gifts, with a few additions. A copy of the Last Will and Testament documenting the bequest must be obtained prior to the acceptance of the object. It is the responsibility of the estate to have an appraisal completed prior to dispersal. It is the Society's general policy not to accept restricted bequests.

D. Exchanges:

¹ Peter Hirtle of Cornell University maintains a worksheet on the Web which breaks down the copyright laws for different time periods in U.S. history and who they may apply to museums. The Website address is <http://copyright.cornell.edu/resources/publicdomain.cfm>.

Exchanges are an acceptable method of adding to the collection. All exchanges, with museums, private individuals, dealers, or profitable corporations must be approved by both the Collections Committee and the Board of Trustees.

An appraisal should be made of all of the materials proposed for exchange to ensure that the items are of equal monetary value. When a discrepancy is present, the two parties must come to an agreement as to how the financial difference can be resolved, either through a monetary gift or exchange of objects with more equal value.

X. ACCESSIONS

All procedures for accessioning items into the object collection, as well as for cataloging and housing accessioned objects, are detailed in the Museum Registration Manual kept in the Curator of Collections' office. All procedures for accessioning items into the archival and library collection, as well as for arranging and describing accessioned items, are detailed in the Processing Manual kept in the Curator of Library & Archives' office. Both documents were created by staff members following best practices and professional standards, and are regularly updated.

XI. DEACCESSIONS

The Society reserves the right to dispose of any collection item that later becomes a duplicate, is displaced by an item of greater relevance or quality, or is otherwise unsuitable to the collections. Deaccessioning, or the disposal of an item from the Society's collection, must be approached with great caution. Deaccessioning should not be undertaken for the primary purpose of generating revenue. All proceeds derived from deaccessioning are designated for the acquisition of new items and the direct care of existing collections.

1. Items, either from the museum or library and archive collection that do not adhere to the mission of the Historical Society, that are of poor quality, are duplicates, have no provenance, or are in irreparable condition, may be considered for deaccessioning. When deaccessioning is considered, a full written justification of the proposed action, including an explanation of the terms of accessioning, will be made by the Director and the Committee to the Board of Trustees.
2. Before deaccessioning any item from the collections, efforts must be made to ascertain that the Society hold free and clear legal title to the object. If there is any uncertainty, these items shall not be deaccessioned. The burden of clearing title rests with the Curator and the Curator of Library & Archives, working in conjunction with the Director.
3. Deaccessioning follows a strict sequence of review. The Curators make recommendations and clear titles and the Director and Collections Committee consider the recommendations and bring them to the Board of Trustees for a vote. The Curators, Director, and Collections Committee must be in full agreement before it can be brought

to the Board of Directors. There shall be an opportunity for discussion at two consecutive meetings of the Board of Trustees. The written recommendation from the Director and the Committee shall be included in the minutes. Final action rests with the Board of Trustees. No object is deemed to have left the collection without this entire review process. A previously unaccessioned object is subject to the same review process as an accessioned object.

XII. DISPOSAL

The Director and Committee shall dispose of deaccessioned items according to their best judgment, reporting the appraisal and the proceeds from the sale to the Board of Trustees. No deaccessioned material may be given, purchased or bid on at auction by a member of the Staff, the Collections Committee, the Board, or by members of their family. Notations on the method of disposal, date, receiver, and price will be put in the accession file so that there is a permanent record of the item.

Methods of disposal are limited to the following:

- a. Public Auction is the preferred method of disposal. Where appropriate, objects at auction will be identified as deaccessioned from the Society's collection. No deaccessioned item will be sold directly to a private individual, dealer, or profitable corporation. However, items may be auctioned through invited bids from specialized dealers, or sold directly to another non-profit institution.
- b. Objects in such poor condition that, in the view of the Curators, no market demand exists, may be destroyed with the approval of the Director and the Committee. All objects must first be photographed, formally deaccessioned, and recorded in the object file.
- c. Objects may be deaccessioned and exchanged with another institution, individual, dealer, or profitable corporation for objects of comparable value that are relevant. Objects may also be deaccessioned and given directly to another non-profit institution.

The above procedure applies to the historical collections of the Society. The staff also maintains a collection of books in the library for reference and research use. They eventually become outdated and replaced with new scholarship, and as cataloging of these materials continues, duplicates are uncovered. These books are not subject to the same item-by-item deaccession guidelines noted above, but should be carefully reviewed by the staff prior to examination by at least two book dealers for possible sale.

XIII. CONSERVATION

The Society is responsible for an ongoing program of object conservation, and for the continual maintenance and preservation of the collections following generally accepted professional practices. The Curator of Collections and/or Curator of Library & Archives will identify potential conservation projects based on the following criteria: the condition

of individual items, with priority given to those most in need of treatment; exhibition, either at the Society or as part of a loan to another institution; new acquisitions; or items identified through outside conservation studies or other surveys of the collection. All conservation projects will be proposed by the Curators to the Director and then to the Collections Committee, who will then make a recommendation for action to the Board of Trustees.

XIV. INVENTORY OF COLLECTIONS

As of the most recent revision of the Collections Policy, the Society has completed, at a minimum, a shelf-level inventory of every collection storage area. Most storage areas have been inventoried on an item-level basis within the past ten years. The Society treats inventorying as an ongoing project.

The Curator of Collections will complete an inventory of every new exhibition and record all changes made to existing exhibitions. All new acquisitions will be entered into CollectionSpace, the Society's collection management software for its object collection. The database includes location history for every entered object and is updated to reflect new storage locations, exhibition, and other changes. The Curator will also continue to input those accessioned items not previously entered, ensuring that each record includes the object's current location.

XV. LOANS

A. Incoming Loans:

Loans may be undertaken for purposes of exhibit, study, or photography. The Society does not accept long-term loans.

Unless otherwise specified in writing, the Society shall be responsible for insurance on all incoming loans. The Curator of Collections and Curator of Library & Archives are responsible for making condition reports on all incoming loans. Loans are to be reviewed annually by the Director and the appropriate Collections Committee.

B. Outgoing Loans:

Outgoing loans will be considered for the purpose of exhibition or conservation with approval from the Board of Trustees. The Director and Curators will consider proposed exhibition loans of library and museum material to established public institutions which demonstrate the capability of protecting, insuring, exhibiting, and handling loan materials. All other loans will be released only to professionals approved by the staff and/or Collections Committee. The Society reserves the right to reject any such request based on the object's condition, the length of the loan, the intended use or the condition of the facilities of the borrower.

Loans must be insured by the other institution for full estimated value. Certificates of insurance and facility reports must be presented before the object is released. Unless otherwise agreed, the Society will charge the borrower for packing, shipping, insurance, and/or conservation.

Library and archival materials do not circulate. They are only considered for loan under the same conditions as established above.

XVI. ABANDONED PROPERTY

Abandoned property contained within the museum falls into two groups: unclaimed loans and items that have been found in the collection.

- Unclaimed loans are items originally loaned to the museum that, for whatever reason, remain in the museum collection. The original owner has either moved or passed away and a clear chain of ownership can no longer be established. In some cases, these items have been previously accessioned into the permanent collection. While this is no longer the policy of the Society governing incoming loans, any such item may need to be deaccessioned before further action can be taken.
- An object may be deemed “found in collection” if it meets the following criteria: there is no visible accession number on the object itself or on any tag or label attached to the object; there is a clear case for the object being part of the collection and not a prop, personal belonging, reference material, piece of the education collection, or any similar designation; and no matching accession number or acquisition record is found in the institutional records, including all appropriate accessions books, accession files, collection inventories, and card catalogues. The presumption is that these items were donated to the museum, likely in the years before professional staff, and the proper documentation and transfer of ownership to the institution were never completed.

The staff will make every effort to resolve long-term loans and research institutional records to document found in collections items. In all cases of abandoned property, the Society will follow the procedures and guidelines outlined in the most current abandoned property law in the State of Connecticut. As of this revision, the current law is defined in the General Statutes of Connecticut, Volume 3, Title 11, Chapter 194, § 11-80 to § 11-85, a copy of which will be kept in the Curatorial Procedures Manual in the Curator of Collections’ office.

If the staff wishes to keep an item in the collection, documentation of all efforts taken in accordance with the abandoned property law should be kept with the file in case of any future legal issues. If the staff decides that a long-term loan or found in collection item

should be deaccessioned, the staff should first generate all of the necessary ownership research and document all efforts taken in accordance with the abandoned property law before proceeding with the Society's established deaccession procedures. Each item should be brought before the Collections Committee and reviewed on a case-by-case basis, with both the Committee and, should the Committee approve the deaccession, the Board of Trustees being informed of the object's history and the efforts taken by the staff to resolve any abandoned property limitations in accordance with state law.

XVII. INSURANCE

The Society insures its in-house collections. The Society also insures short-term, incoming loans borrowed for exhibition, unless otherwise determined by both institutions. Outgoing loans must be insured by the other institution for full estimated value, unless otherwise determined by both institutions. Certificates of insurance and must be presented before the object is released. The Society should always insure outgoing loans that are otherwise not insured.

XVIII. PHOTOGRAPHY

The Historical Society encourages photographic service requests of its collection and archival items. The procedures for executing a photographic request are outlined in the Museum Registration Manual. A regular fee schedule has been established and is adhered to, with exceptions to be made at the Director's discretion.

Scholars may be permitted to take photographs of objects for study purposes. No one may take or use photographs for publication without the Director, Curator of Collections, or Curator of Library & Archives' written permission. The Society enforces its ownership and all the privileges that copyright affords, and when images or photographs are published, proper credit must be given to the Historical Society.

XIX. PUBLICATIONS

The Society encourages its staff to publish articles relating to the Society's collections, either in Society publications and newsletter or in other journals. Organizing and writing such publications is a part of staff duties. The Staff may not prepare outside publications on Society time, except for publicity purposes. The Society may also commission a qualified scholar to publish work.

In addition, the Society maintains a blog through their website titled "My Country" in which all members of the staff are encouraged to post stories, anecdotes, and upcoming events.

The Society's website (www.litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org) also contains information on past exhibits, the town's history, specific research topics, and founding Litchfield families. The staff is encouraged to continue to provide information through the website by creating new pages or updating existing content.