

# Litchfield Historical Society, Collection Development Plan 2024

## Executive summary

This Collection Development Plan (CDP) is akin to a strategic plan for the museum’s collections. It helps guide Litchfield Historical Society’s collecting activities to ensure the collection is mission-aligned, supports goals and objectives of the whole organization, and is relevant to present and future audiences. An external consultant, in concert with Litchfield Historical Society (LHS) staff, developed this plan which was subsequently reviewed with the Collections Committee and forwarded to the Board of Trustees for approval.

After a four-month research period that included internal document and scholarly literature reviews, as well as significant community engagement, the consultant produced a research report (Appendix A) that subsequently informed the plan’s development. The report identified several directions for LHS’s collections that focus on narrative, people, experiences with collections, and engagement with youth.

Informed by the research, this CDP reconceptualizes collections as a toolbox of primary source materials that can inform and illustrate significant community narratives. Broadly, the CDP asks LHS to identify the capacity of new acquisitions to contribute to important Litchfield narratives and to evaluate its existing holdings for that same capacity. LHS must also devote time and resources to researching and implementing a digital asset management plan, a system to preserve its existing digital assets [both digital scans and photographs of analog collections and material collected digitally, such as word files, photographs taken on a digital camera, email, etc.] and, equally importantly, make them available to its stakeholders.

In carrying out this plan, LHS will engage with its community in significant new ways including formally involving young people in collection governance, more frequently interacting with the community in collection development, and devoting resources to partnering with historically marginalized communities to identify, lift up, and preserve overlooked histories that may reside in the existing collections. All collection development initiatives require the attention and expertise of LHS’s professional staff. While some goals of this plan may be accomplished as part of routine work, many will require a temporary staff position, expertise from a consultant, reallocation of time currently devoted to other activities, or significant new operating budget expenses.

### Goals and Objectives

Collect essential Litchfield stories	Partner with more people
Define narrative areas Evaluate collections for narrative capacity Create a digital preservation and access program	Engage youth in collection governance Invite stakeholder contributions to narratives Serve more communities in meaningful ways Make acquisitions newsworthy

# Introduction

## Purpose, relationship to other documents

This Collection Development Plan (CDP) is akin to a strategic plan for Litchfield Historical Society's collections. It will guide the organization's collecting activities in deliberate ways to (1) ensure the collection is aligned with LHS's mission, (2) support goals and objectives of the whole organization, and (3) remain relevant for present and future audiences. The CDP was adopted by the Board of Trustees who have ultimate fiduciary responsibility for the organization, including the collections.

Providing a succinct review of the organization's history, its collection, and the context in which the plan was developed, the CDP outlines the rationale for identifying specific collection development goals. It also specifies what steps LHS will undertake to meet those goals and, if appropriate, how it will fund those activities. This CDP looks toward the future. While the document was adopted by the Board, it is designed to accommodate changes in LHS's operating environment that may arise after the plan's adoption.

This document works in concert with LHS's Collection Management Policy (CMP) and the Strategic Plan it will develop in 2024. Each document will help ensure the organization is effectively developing and stewarding its collections in accordance with the public trust. LHS's CMP, also adopted by the Board of Trustees, provides guidelines for the day-to-day activities that support collection development in fair and consistent ways. The Strategic Plan will apply to all of LHS's operations including collection development, exhibitions, and associated programming.

## How the CDP was developed

Frank + Glory, an external consulting firm, led this plan's creation process with support from LHS staff. The consultant devoted four months to research activities, including active stakeholder and community engagement and review of internal documents and scholarly publications. The resulting research report is further described below and attached as Appendix A. Using the research findings as a guide, the LHS staff team met several times with the consultant to review an organizing scheme and drafts of the document; the final meeting on February 2, 2024 included members of the Collections Committee. The staff team completed final revisions on the document on February 2, 2024 and presented it to the Board of Trustees for adoption on February 8, 2024. The staff who worked to develop the CDP included two male, three female, all cisgender people aged between 25 and 50. One staff member identifies as LGBTQAI+. The team identified as non-Hispanic Caucasian. The demographics of the team mirror those of the surrounding community. For more information on community demographics, see the research report (Appendix A). A grant from Connecticut Humanities supported the plan-development process.

## CDP in action

This CDP is intended to guide all collection development actions. The plan's goals and objectives should justify all acquisitions for the collection including decisions to make purchases and to accept or decline gifts. LHS Staff and the Collections Committee should reference this plan each time an acquisition or deaccession is considered, to ensure alignment with the CDP goals and objectives. The CDP may also guide other activities such as exhibition planning, community engagement, incoming and

outgoing loan programs, and conservation or preservation planning, and organization-wide strategic and interpretive plans.

## **Context**

### **Brief history of the organization**

Litchfield Historical Society (LHS) was founded in 1856. The organization began as a group of people interested in Litchfield's history and, like many 19th century historical societies, gathered for lectures on historical topics often presented by the membership. It has been registered as a nonprofit organization since 1938. LHS was granted its second re-accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) in 2017<sup>1</sup>.

Today, LHS owns and occupies four structures. The purpose-built 1901 Noyes Memorial Building (at the corner of South and East Streets) houses the Litchfield History Museum and the Helga J. Ingraham Memorial Library. In 1910, LHS acquired the Litchfield Law School followed by the Tapping Reeve House in 1929. It successfully listed those structures as National Historic Landmarks in 1965. In 2007, the Pamela Cunningham Copeland Curatorial Center, a collections storage building, was added to the rear of the Tapping Reeve House lot; in 2018, the remainder of the Tapping Reeve House lot was opened as a public space--the Tapping Reeve Meadow.

The organization was run entirely by volunteers and community members until the late 1960s when the first professionally trained director was hired. Two leaders made significant impact on LHS's development. Lockett Ford Ballard, Jr. led the organization in the 1970s and again in the 1980s; Catherine Keene Fields served LHS as Executive Director for 35 years from 1988 to 2023. The organization added additional skilled staff beginning in the 1990s. As of early 2024, the organization is staffed by an Executive Director, Archivist, Curator, Head of Education, and Visitor Services Coordinator.

### **Brief history of the collections**

The Society did not begin actively collecting until the 1890s, 40 years after its founding. At that time, following a renewed national interest in colonial history, partly as a reaction to waves of European immigration, a new group of enthusiastic LHS members started to seek objects for donation as part of a general revitalization of the Society. The museum accessioned a wide variety of items including archival material, natural history specimens, an apiary collection, assorted items related to national history, and local historical objects. Other similar organizations across the country engaged in this pattern of collecting as well. Early historical societies often saw bringing important aspects of global and national history to their region their main focus as, rather than preserving regional history.

LHS adopted its first Collection Management Policy (CMP) in 2006. That first policy was likely created to satisfy American Alliance of Museums accreditation standards, which started requiring CMPs for accreditation around the start of the 21st century. Major revisions to the CMP were adopted in 2012

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<sup>1</sup> LSH achieved its first accreditation in 1992.

and 2022. Those policy documents helped narrow the collection from one of broad scope to one focused on the Town of Litchfield.

Today the LHS collections consist of archival and library materials and three-dimensional objects. Although the organization has purposely narrowed its collecting scope since its founding, all collection storage areas had reached capacity by 2023. Most of the library and archival materials are stored in the lower level of the Noyes Building; newspapers are stored at the Curatorial Center. Three-dimensional collections are housed in three buildings: (1) two areas of compact shelving in the Noyes building, (2) compact shelving area in the basement and stationary shelving on the second floor of the Tapping Reeve House, and (3) in the Curatorial Center.

Since 2002, one professional Archivist and one professional Curator hold primary responsibility for the development and care of the collections and public access to them.

## **Mission and vision**

Mission: 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. (Adopted by the Board of Trustees in 2016)

Vision: 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. (Adopted by the Board of Trustees in 2016)

## **Rationale for plan development at this time**

LHS has addressed collection planning in a variety of ways during its history. Although collecting goals were not included in the 2006 CMP, the 2012 version included an extensive Collecting Goals section. In 2022, LHS adopted a new CMP that required creation of the organization's first Collection Development Plan. This CDP addresses that requirement.

As previously noted, the organization's storage areas are full. This comprehensive CDP will ensure that the collection continues to be shaped by specific collection development directives that are operationally sustainable and support the needs of LHS's communities now and in the future.

## **Research report summary**

The research report (Appendix A) that informs this CDP engaged in multiple research streams: first, professional guidance from the museum and library field was consulted as part of a literature review; second, LHS's internal documents helped reveal how the collection has changed over time; and third, considerable effort was devoted to learning from LHS's communities via focus groups and individual conversations. Those conversations provided insight into stakeholders' perceptions of the existing collection and how they would like to see it developed. The research report revealed four topics that are addressed by this Plan:

- 1) People are paramount: All research streams highlight that museums are essentially for people in the present and future; the human aspect of collections and collecting activities is essential.

- 2) Experiences over objects: Yesterday's makers and users were interacting with objects by building, writing, creating, destroying, or otherwise acting upon materials. Similarly, today's audiences interact with the collections through programming, lectures, forums, tours, and other forms of social and cultural engagement in and around LHS's campus, experiencing the collection rather than simply viewing it.
- 3) Tell stories: LHS's communities are interested in narratives about their own past and about both surprising and familiar aspects of Litchfield's history.
- 4) "The young are at the gates": Since the late 18th century, many notable Americans have spent their formative years in Litchfield. LHS communities stressed the importance of continuing to center, acknowledge, and engage today's young people in determining the future of LHS and its collections.

## **Audiences**

The CDP helps LHS shape the collection to address the needs of its audiences, including those it has yet to engage with. LHS serves multiple audience groups both locally and nationally. On occasion, the needs of these audiences come into conflict with each other. LHS plans to better describe its current and potential audiences in the future - potentially as part of, or as a result of, its 2024 strategic planning process. This CDP should subsequently be revised to align with audiences as described in future planning.

## **Goals and objectives**

The following goals and objectives will guide development of the collection in a purposeful way, address themes that emerged during the research process, and ensure that the collection continues to serve the mission and audience. All of the goals and objectives in this plan require targeted application of existing resources, and in most cases, new resources yet to be identified. See "Implementing the Plan" below for more information about adequately resourcing the CDP's goals and objectives.

### **Collect essential Litchfield stories**

This goal helps to ensure that all archival materials and objects in the collection are versatile and add to LHS's ability to tell diverse, people-centered narratives about Litchfield. The objectives below support the idea that all materials in the collection can illustrate multiple stories about people in Litchfield's past and present.

#### **Define narrative areas for the collection**

Narrative areas will help LHS understand the possible ways in which various cultural heritage materials can support mission delivery in practical ways. Narrative areas should be broad, open to interpretation, and evolve as the organization and its audiences change. Evaluating a potential acquisition against the narrative areas can help more clearly determine the relative utility of a proposed acquisition. For a list and description of Narrative areas, see Appendix B.

#### **Evaluate holdings based on narrative capacity**

Some cultural heritage materials are better story-tellers than others. Ensure that each object and collection of archival materials document Litchfield's stories in meaningful ways.

- Research, develop, and implement a tiering system by July 2025: A tiering system is used in conjunction with existing accession and deaccession criteria in the Collection Management Policy and can help assess current and prospective holdings along a matrix that considers attributes such as mission-alignment, narrative capacity, condition, and other factors determining the relevance of the materials for the museum's collection (Jones, 2018). Tiering has been used as a method of evaluating museum collections since at least 2001 (Fahey & Deck, 2001). The adopted tiering system can first be applied to new acquisitions, then to existing holdings.
- Perform an inventory and collection assessment: The tiering system will help with an item-level collection assessment for objects. The assessment should have two results. First, it should generate a list of objects appropriate for deaccession because they do not support the organization's mission or for which LHS lacks resources to provide effective care or access. These recommendations may include items that are redundant, in poor condition, or more appropriate for other repositories. Second the assessment should recommend areas of active collecting, passive collecting, or static collections (no additions).
  - By December 2024, develop a schedule for inventory and/or assessment of all artifact holdings and record location for all manuscript collections in the ArchivesSpace database to be completed by December 2026.
  - Begin assessment work with backlog materials in January 2027 to ensure that effort in addressing the backlog is only applied to materials that directly support LHS's mission and collecting goals.

#### **Create and fund a sustainable digital preservation and access program December 2025**

It is essential for LHS to create a plan to collect, preserve, manage, and make digital materials accessible. Both staff and community members identified the need to preserve local digital publications and new or existing oral histories and ensure they can be used by stakeholders. While grant funding could initiate and allow for implementation of a pilot digital asset management system, newly identified operating funds must sustain these activities as a long-term investment in the LHS mission. Digital assets require less physical space compared to paper and artifact collections, but may necessitate greater resources to provide both access and preservation. When discussing digital materials, museums and archives typically hold two types - digital surrogates (scans, photographs, or reformatted video and audio) of analog materials (journals, newspapers, photographs, furniture, VHS tapes, etc.) and born-digital materials (items for which no three-dimensional version exists). Born-digital materials include text, image, audio, and video files in a variety of formats. Digital surrogates and born-digital materials each have their own preservation and access concerns.

- Benchmark digitization, digital collecting, preservation, and access efforts by December 2024: Reach out to organizations of similar size with both archival and three-dimensional materials in their collections to learn from their success and failures.
- Seek technical assistance; support ongoing professional development by December 2024. Maintaining a digital asset management system requires special knowledge and technical skills training. Ensure staff are supported with appropriate learning opportunities.
- Research, identify, and select a Digital Asset Management System by December 2025: Establish procedures for use involving both born-digital and digitization of analog materials to understand the different resource requirements of those different formats. Implement in 2026.

- Investigate opportunities for collaborating on this work with the community, especially youth, by July 2026: Whether or not individual young people possess an innate understanding of digital information, they will eventually be responsible for the long-term preservation of LHS and its physical and digital collections. Engaging them in this process will also serve as a path to conveying the complexities of preservation to the wider community.

## **Partner with more people**

This area of work aims to build upon the sense of ownership many members of Litchfield's community already feel for the organization and its collections.

### **Create one or more formal roles for youth in collections development**

Community members stressed the importance of encouraging younger people in the community to be more involved in the organization in ways that are meaningful to them. Leverage LHS's existing experience with public-facing young employees and interns to invite youth participation in collection development.

- Add two seats for youth members to the Collections Committee that can weigh in on a variety of collection development decisions.

### **Let Litchfield communities tell LHS why collections matter.**

Create opportunities for community involvement in determining meaning and relevance of collections. Community members recounted that items in the collection were donated by people just like them, and expressed curiosity about learning new facets of familiar stories.

- Create regularly scheduled but informal opportunities for locals to tell LHS what objects in the collection mean to them such as:
  - Display objects and archival materials for which LHS seeks additional information, and invite the community to contribute insights that enhance narratives or add missing information.
  - Provide opportunities to debunk myths or assumptions about Litchfield or materials in the collection.
  - Ask different kinds of people in the community to share what they know/feelings about the same story/object/group of material. Find ways to meet people where they are.
  - Using community input and new academic research, offer another side of a well-worn narrative.
- Annually or biannually, poll the community through surveys, social media, or other feedback methods, to elicit input on current and planned exhibition topics.

### **Serve more communities in meaningful ways**

Litchfield is a demographically homogeneous community. However, it is possible to identify and document specific segments of the community more intentionally. In all instances, those collections should be developed and interpreted with direct participation of related community members.

### Historically marginalized communities

Community members identified interest in learning about stories of historically marginalized people that might reside in the collections. This group includes indigenous populations, enslaved and free African-Americans, immigrants, people living in poverty, members of the working class, and women.

- Engage in targeted research to surface stories of these communities that may already exist in the collections but were not recorded by the original catalogers.
- Prioritize these materials when engaging in any initiative to expand public access to any collection.

### Contemporary creators

Litchfield has a long history of production - of ideas, manufactured goods, produce, and art. When asked what they thought was missing from the Litchfield area, several community members noted that working artists have been inconsistently supported by regional organizations.

- Develop one or more sustainable methods to add recency to the collections that document Litchfield's continuing creative community.

### Contemporary youth

LHS already provides notable opportunities for youth employment at its properties during the summer in addition to an internship program. The Law School and Female Academy in the late 18th and early 19th centuries is well-documented in the collection and that story of young people in Litchfield might be brought into the present by purposefully collecting materials that share diverse perspectives of events that have impacted youth in the present or more recent past.

- Document the formation of Regional School District 20. School district consolidation was noted by community members as one of the most important currently unfolding situations to record for the future. LHS will work with individuals within the school system to document this change.

### **Make the acquisition process a newsworthy event.**

Community members highlighted several areas for future collection development, most of which LHS is already actively collecting. Ensure the community is aware of existing efforts.

- Issue press releases or blog posts that document and highlight the acquisition process. Include photos of the donor and their contributions, use the opportunity to add contextual information (verbal, or supporting materials) from the community.
- Dedicate a part of the LHS website to share collecting activities, highlighting recent acquisitions and items that are desired; make a connection between financial support of LHS with expenses related to standard of care and acquisition process.

## **Implementing the plan**

### **Authority**

This Collection Development Plan was adopted by the Board of Trustees on February 8, 2024, and, thereafter, carried out by LHS Staff in consultation with the Collections Committee.



## Resources

All goals in this plan will require resources to accomplish. Those resources may be existing staff time, additional staff time, actively facilitating professional development and new hire training, and/or short- or long-term funding for operational needs.

## Staff capacity

All collection development initiatives require the attention and expertise of professional staff. While some goals of this plan may be accomplished as part of routine work, others will require a temporary staff position, expertise from a consultant, or reallocation of time currently devoted to other activities.

## Governance

To more thoroughly involve board members in the full spectrum of collection development activities, make the following governance changes:

- Revise the Collection Management Policy by December 31, 2024 to:
  - Investigate ways to document involvement of the Collections Committee in acquisitions
  - Expand the definition of “cost” for acquisition to include physical space requirements and staff time for processing to make the acquisition accessible
  - Add specific accession criteria that mirror deaccession criteria
    - Add a criterion for accession that references LHS’s capacity to make the acquisition accessible to the public
    - Add a criterion that all acquisitions must support the goals of the CDP
  - Add a Scope of Collection statement that describes a collection most beneficial to LHS’s mission, rather than a description of the contents of the existing collection. Specifically address the desired scope for materials related to people whose primary social impact occurred outside the Litchfield region (i.e., law school students)
  - Add a section similar to inventory that requires a general assessment of the collection within a long interval (i.e., “The collection will be assessed for relevance to the mission not less than every 20 years”)
- Create and adopt a charter for the Collections Committee by December 2024.
  - Incorporate youth members
  - Identify duties, time commitment, and expectations of all members.

## Funding and contributions to the collection

This CDP requires LHS to reorient and refocus existing activities and engage in new activities. Financial and operational support will be required to realize the CDP’s goals.

- Create and fund a digital preservation and access plan. This plan will ensure the preservation of digital surrogates (images of analog materials in the collection) and born-digital material (items for which no analog version exists). Creating the plan will constitute an expense, as will the short- and long-term implementation of the plan. Ensure that the plan contains provisions for public access to the digital collections.
- Develop a list of corporate and private partners that may support this plan’s goals.

## **Communication**

Plan availability: The CDP and accompanying research report are posted on LHS's website to promote transparency. The CDP was funded by Connecticut Humanities and can be used as a model for other organizations interested in creating such a plan.

Plan distribution: All new staff, board members, and Collections Committee members should receive a copy of the CDP as part of their onboarding materials.

## **Priorities**

This plan prioritizes reconsideration of the existing collections to connect them to each other and to visitors for maximum mission-related impact. It simultaneously seeks to further develop the collection to tell significant local stories with a 21st-century audience in mind.

- Revise the CMP to include governance changes, scope of collection statement, and clear accession criteria by December 2024.
- Staff will further develop narrative areas (proposed areas included as Appendix B) by June 2024.
- Create and adopt a Collections Committee charter by December 2024; establish formal roles for young people in collection development.
- Research and implement a tiering system by July 2025.
- Create a Digital Preservation and Access Program by July 2026.
- Conduct a general collection assessment by December 2026.
- Engage the broader community in collection development, exhibition planning, and intellectual control activities. (Ongoing)

## **Updating the plan**

This plan was created with a robust process of research and stakeholder feedback, and while it anticipates the future, is not omniscient. Therefore, this CDP should be considered a malleable and living document, a wide path with guardrails.

### **Review and update procedures**

At a minimum, the plan should be formally reviewed by Staff at the end of each year, who will report the results of their review to the Collections Committee. As needs arise, Staff may amend the plan in consultation with the Collections Committee. If amendments require additional financial support, impact relationships in the community, or otherwise anticipate a significant change in the museum's collection, those revisions should be forwarded to the Board of Trustees for adoption. Not less than once every five years, the Collections Committee will review, revise, and readopt the CDP, then forward it to the Board of Trustees for adoption/readoption.



**FRANK & GLORY**

# Collection Development Plan Research Report

## Litchfield Historical Society

November 2023

### Introduction

Litchfield Historical Society (LHS) was founded in 1856 and today is dedicated to preserving the history of the Town of Litchfield and making its local, national, and international significance accessible to all. Its mission is “to illuminate the rich and nationally significant history of Litchfield, enabling each of us to construct meaning from the past for the present and future.” Its vision is to “bring people together to discover, experience, and share the many diverse stories that have made its community a distinctive place.” LHS believes that every individual adds something to the story of Litchfield and recognizes that each of those stories is important to a collective understanding of its community.

LHS comprises the (1) Litchfield History Museum and (2) Helga J. Ingraham Memorial Library at the corner of South and East Streets, and the (3) Tapping Reeve House & Litchfield Law School, (4) Pamela Cunningham Copeland Curatorial Center, and (5) public outdoor space – Tapping Reeve Meadow – all located a short walk away at 82 South Street. Although founded in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the organization did not begin assembling a collection until about 40 years after its inception when all manner of objects relating to science and history were accepted. Since that time, LHS has refined its collection scope to focus on the Town of Litchfield, the villages it contains, Litchfield Law School, and associated Litchfield Female Academy. With five full-time staff, the organization has a lean operating structure. An Archivist and a Curator have primary responsibility for the collections. LHS was accredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) in 2017. In 2023 its Executive Director retired following 35 years of service. A former curator was hired as the new Executive Director; and the organization will begin a strategic planning process in 2024.

In 2022, LHS adopted a new Collection Management Policy (CMP) that requires creation of the organization’s first Collection Development Plan (CDP). Previously, brief collecting goals were included in the CMP. LHS seeks to adopt a flexible, easily updatable, and practical plan that will guide development and refinement of the collection – including accession and deaccession – with particular focus on relevance of that collection to LHS’s mission and the Litchfield, CT community.

While the remainder of CDP writing process will be collaborative, this research report was completed by Frank + Glory, LLC, the consultant hired to facilitate plan development. Research is the first step in preparing to write a CDP, and this report reviews the methods used to gather information, findings from

those research activities, and suggested implications of those findings that could be used to inform the CDP.

## Methodology

The research undertaken to create this report consists of and relies upon qualitative methods. In addition to a review of recent scholarship and a survey of existing organizational guiding documents at LHS, Frank + Glory facilitated many semi-structured conversations with stakeholders, through individual feedback sessions and focus groups. This work was designed to understand a range of perspectives about LHS's collections, strengths and weaknesses of the corpus of those materials, how the museum and archives collections were assembled, how they're currently used, and how they might be used and developed in the future. The research was multimodal and iterative to allow themes to rise to the surface.

### Literature review

This research relied on newer ideas in collection planning in museums, research libraries, and archives. Evergreen scholarship and manuals were also consulted. The canonical guidebook for collection planning remains the *AAM Guide to Collections Planning* (Gardner & Merritt, 2004). That work, as well as multiple other articles and guides released between 2000 and 2010, seem to have been published in response to the early 1990s recession and the 2007-2008 financial crisis. At the beginning of the 21st century, financial urgency prompted many museums to consider their collecting practices in a more circumspect way. After the economy began to rebound, or because the particular problem of collections planning had been undertaken by enough organizations, publication of collections planning guidance ebbed.

More recently, and in significantly visible ways, many museums have begun to question the origins and contents of their collections, especially in response to the revived Black Lives Matter movement's protests against injustice and incidents of police brutality in 2020. New ideas in collection planning center around representation of historically marginalized groups, activation of collections, and contemporary, current, rapid, and community collecting; all concepts to support collecting history as it is happening, particularly in cases of community trauma and healing.

Current scholarship suggests that museums should engage in collection planning to ensure collection development is "rational, tied to institutional goals, and realistic" (Greene, 2018). Further, scholars point out that collection development decisions are inherently subjective. While nearly 20 years old, the notion that museums are not neutral remains relevant in museums today; the idea purports museums are instead social participants and decisions by their staff are made within a set of social circumstances (Coffee, 2006). Actions taken by museum professionals on behalf of the collection (accession, deaccession, loan, distribution of care resources) are all choices made by people under a set of temporal circumstances (Filene, 2018). Collecting in the 21st century is better accomplished with the end user in mind, and based on a researched and structured plan for what a future audience may need. One way to acknowledge the positionality of the museum and its staff within society is through considerate and effective collection planning.

Dr. Magdalena Buchczyk, anthropologist and museum practitioner, advocates for collection development approached as a prefigurative practice rather than as a method of correcting the repository's existing

holdings (2022). A good CDP can help an organization grow and practice new institutional habits, directly engage community members in determining what is important, and reduce the impact of individual curatorial judgment on the corpus of the collection over time. Under a bold new approach, collection development activities can play a part in influencing culture and society through deliberate and participatory collection development decisions that shape the museum's holdings into a tool to enact social change and promote historical memory. Buchczyk calls on museums not to simply collect what is happening around them, but to collect objects that tell the stories of a more just future. Ultimately, Filene (2018) and Buchczyk (2022) ask professional assemblers of museum collections to understand the subjectivity involved in the task of collection development and rather than try to overcome it, they challenge the field to acknowledge the biased and constructivist nature of this work and use it as an advantage. Support around viewing museums as active participants in society, instead of as observers or reflectors, is welcomed by the public; people who value arts and culture organizations are more likely to support organizational growth toward greater community relevance and representation in the collection and display of objects and to want arts and culture organizations to be active participants in addressing social issues in their communities (Slover Linett Audience Research, 2022).

How might a museum go about this? Many of the suggestions from AAM's 2004 text as well as a chapter in *Small Museum Toolkit Volume 6, Stewardship: Collections and Historic Preservation* (Meister & Hoff, 2012) offer further guidance about the CDP development process and the benefits of creating such a document. Taken together, the two manuals provide a comprehensive method of planning for the development of collections at LHS and other similar organizations.

### Internal document review

In addition to scholarship about collection development in general, several of LHS's relevant internal documents were reviewed. The organization has been governed by a CMP since at least 2006, likely created to satisfy accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums which started requiring CMPs in the late 1990s or early 2000s. Since 2006, the Board of Trustees approved new CMPs in 2012 and 2022, each replacing the previous. In terms of how LHS's collection were shaped by those CMPs, three sections are notable - how each policy describes the history of the collection, the description of the existing collection, and how each policy treats the task of collection development.

In the 2006 policy, the "collection of fine and decorative arts, artifacts of daily life, archival and library materials" is mentioned directly in the organization's mission statement at the front of the document. The collections were further described later in the CMP as being "divided into two distinct collections." The museum collection is described as comprising fine and decorative arts, while the library collection contained informational materials and the organizational archive. As with other multidisciplinary organizations, paper-based decorative materials posed a problem in assigning stewardship responsibility and LHS decided to place "two-dimensional objects with a visual or pictorial component" in the museum collection and "documentary" and "audio/visual" materials in the library collections.

By 2012, LHS's mission had evolved to exclude a detailed description of the collection and it added a Collection Categories section that separated and robustly described both the Museum Collection and the

Helga J. Ingraham Memorial Library Collection.<sup>1</sup> The 2022 policy follows the same format. In both 2012 and 2022, the Museum Collection is described as a single group of 20,000 objects categorized by object type; the Library Collection lists holdings by extent of broad format groups (e.g., 90 microfilm reels, 360 linear feet of manuscripts). In 2006, 2012, and 2022, all three policies lead with fine and decorative arts when describing the scope of the Museum Collection.

How each policy handles collection development demonstrates the greatest difference in the 16 years spanning the first and third policies. In 2006, collection development is represented only by the sentence: “The criteria for the development of collections are that objects must have either historical significance and/or aesthetic quality and be related to Litchfield.” This inclusion seems an afterthought in comparison to a much more robust section in the 2012 policy.

In the Collecting Goals section of the 2012 CMP, nearly one full page in length was added to the policy; collection development increased from one sentence to about 15% of the document’s contents. The connection between the Museum and Library Collections are called out as a strength of the collection, rather than being “two distinct collections” as they were in 2006. Collection development goals outlined in 2012 were intended to enhance existing strengths of the collection and add content in the specific categories of: (1) printed works of Law School graduates, (2) materials that document agriculture, (3) works of Litchfield artists, (4) schools, (5) the 20th century in general, (6) historically marginalized communities, and (7) businesses and residents of smaller communities, particularly in electronic formats. By 2022, collection development is mentioned as a separate activity to be dictated by a Collection Development Plan (the document this research will support).

The 2012 and 2022 CMPs contain identical History of the Collections section that describe how the organization’s collection developed beginning in the 1850s. The section references the lack of professional staff until the 1960s and a broader collecting scope (natural history, national history, etc) in place for most of the 20th century.

In sum, consideration of collection development at LHS has changed significantly since the organization was founded: from collecting “everything” in the 19th century to separating the Collection Development Plan from the CMP in 2022. A separate Collection Development Plan will help LHS consider management of the existing collection separately from future evolution of the collection.

## Stakeholder interviews

In addition to reviewing internal documents and scholarly publications, this research engaged a variety of people in helping to shape the future of LHS’s collection.<sup>2</sup> Individual conversations were conducted with internal stakeholders – those with an existing staff role at LHS. Board members of several other related regional and local historical societies shared their respective institutions’ collecting goals and were asked

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<sup>1</sup> The Library was mentioned in the 2006 policy but as a distinct operational unit/structure along with the Tapping Reeve House & Litchfield Law School.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that Litchfield’s population is 94.4% white and all participants in the stakeholder interviews were white. (United States Census Bureau, 2021)

to reflect on the collections at LHS and how they might envision referencing LHS's CDP if it became available for external use. The participating organizations hold collections that overlap with the art, artifacts, and archival materials stewarded by LHS. They were also asked to imagine deeper collaboration with LHS in terms of their collections.

Feedback from the public was captured through one focus group of five participants and three stakeholder interviews. Participants for these feedback opportunities were either (i) self-identified through a screener survey posted on LHS's social media channels, in its newsletter, and fliers posted in the community, or they were (ii) identified by staff as enthusiastic users of the collections or collaborators in recent programming and exhibition projects. Focus group participants included longtime residents of Litchfield and community leaders.

These direct-feedback opportunities occurred in early Fall 2023. Opening with a general description of the CDP creation process and the consulting firm's role in the work alongside LHS staff, open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview format encouraged conversation. Prior to the discussion opportunities, all participants were asked to verbally consent to the conversation and were asked to list demographic characteristics that would describe them, the latter of which was not required. Most participants in the focus groups and interviews identified as White and over 60. Focus group participants were informed that their participation was intended to be confidential and they were asked to protect the anonymity of the other participants in the group. All participants were offered the opportunity to retract any or all of their statements at any point after the call; none elected that option.

A full list of participants in individual interviews can be found in the 'Resources Consulted' section; focus group participants were confidential and individual names are not listed. Erin Richardson, PhD, founder and principal at Frank + Glory, conducted all interviews and facilitated the focus group.

## Findings

Participants in focus groups and individual conversations (staff and community members) described shared ideas that cohere around several themes. The 'Implications and Potential Directions' section presents some options for how to address the themes in a Collection Development Plan.

### People are Paramount

Respondents were very clear that LHS is fundamentally about people, from its buildings to its programs and its collection. Building on this, the community feels that it is a part of the organization, and that the organization is a part of the community. For example, when asked to describe the collection, participants referenced the collection as being sourced from community members, for example as donations from a neighbor or a relative. The richness of the archives, specifically family papers and genealogical information, was referenced as a strength of the collection. Their responses were not about the superlativeness of the collection (which is superlative in many ways). Rather, they focused on the intimacy of detailed information about Litchfield's former residents, particularly about how those people were related directly or indirectly to today's residents. In cases where a piece of evidence may be missing from a local narrative or genealogical record, one respondent went so far as to blame the Litchfield community for the lack of completeness of the archive, rather than the Historical Society itself.

Most museums' community members use "they" or "them" in reference to the organization or to the organization's staff, board of trustees, or major donors. One striking facet of the community feedback is that LHS was not described as an "other" entity outside the community. LHS's community rarely even used "the historical society," to refer to the organization, instead community stakeholders included themselves as part and parcel of the organization with a "we," as in "we have this family's materials," even when the respondent had no formal role within the organization.

Community respondents also expressed a strong connection to LHS's staff both past and present. Multiple former staff people were mentioned in connection to experiences at LHS (see 'Experiences over Objects'). While many other museum-goers view the staff, organization, structure, and collection as a monolith (institution), respondents in Litchfield seemed to understand the staff as members of the community who had a special knowledge and a special role to serve as mediators or conduits. Staff were described as "transparent," "doing a great job," and "getting out incredible objects."

### Experiences over Objects

Although prompted several times to describe the collection or tell a new visitor to Litchfield what LHS had in its collection, no participants mentioned specific objects. Everyone conceived LHS as an extension or component of local geography and noted how opening the Tapping Reeve Meadow changed their experience of the village. They identified with the external environment more than inside the museum building, the Tapping Reeve House, or the Litchfield Law School. Their geographical references appeared as mentions of walking tours, the cemetery, and using the Tapping Reeve Meadow for organized events and informal enjoyment.

Most respondents referred to experiences instead of objects. More than half of participants referenced the floor mosaic map in the Museum, either through their interactions engaging youth with it or observing their children or grandchildren make sense of it. Another respondent referenced the transformative experience of sitting in the law school and imagining what it would have been like to be a student there. They mentioned the smell, the cold temperature, the hard seat, the dim light. Others talked about walking tours, interactions with staff, or exhibition opening events. The "Scarecrows in the Meadow" event came up in the focus group, in a conversation about community engagement and event participation. While staff mentioned that this activity is very loosely mission-related, it has been memorable and highlights the impact of the newly opened meadow.<sup>3</sup>

### Tell stories

When they were mentioned, objects were referenced by feedback participants as illustrations to stories: a fire department logo is a story about the volunteer fire department member and nationally-known artist who designed it; the sign from a closed business is a story about the owner who was also a neighbor; a reproduction desk in the law school is a gateway into both imagining being a teenage student

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<sup>3</sup> It is possible that these references to outdoor activities are artifacts of the recent coronavirus pandemic (2020-2022). Regardless, the Tapping Reeve Meadow has had a notable impact on the community and their use of the entire village.



there in the very-long-ago-past and also recounting what someone “got up to” as a Litchfield teenager in the 1970s.

Stakeholders shared how they want to hear about historical events that occurred during their lifetime, either that they remember or those that occurred outside of their memory and awareness. Oral history opportunities and the “I grew up in Litchfield, CT” Facebook page (n.d.) were frequently referenced as examples of engaging ways to both contribute to and learn about their history.

Community members want to participate in narrating Litchfield stories in their own lifetimes, but they rely on LHS to uncover and share Litchfield’s uncomfortable history and the surprising stories of people they’ve never heard about, including those who may be their new neighbors. Community feedback participants wanted to hear stories of historically marginalized people - working class, immigrants, enslaved populations. They envision connecting to those people of the past through stories and objects. One person stated that LHS should not shy away from unpleasant stories and that local communities need to learn from them.

These stories were suspected to be part of the collection already; respondents felt that LHS should invest time in uncovering and sharing stories of enslaved people in Litchfield and politically difficult stories about immigration, race, and class. The North/South Street and Meadow Street divide was referenced in nearly every conversation along with how opening the Tapping Reeve Meadow provided a barrier-breaking connection between the two streets.<sup>4</sup>

Further, when asked what LHS should be collecting in the future, community members were specific about what stories they wanted to make sure were added to the collection. The ideas below are included because they were mentioned by more than one person in separate interactions (e.g., in more than one individual interview or in an interview and the focus group).

#### Art, artists, and makers

Litchfield has a broad and deep history of incubating creators. However, when artists and makers were brought up by participants it was in reference to those who are currently, or were in the recent past, writing, painting, printing, building, or otherwise creating, in the area. For example, when asked about what LHS collected, no one mentioned Ralph Earle paintings or Silas Cheney furniture. They did, however, mention specific authors, artists, architects from the 20th century. While LHS certainly owns work by some of the referenced creators (e.g., Alexander Calder and Austin Purves), others mentioned may not be in the collection (illustrator Lane Smith, for example).

#### Farms and farming

Many also want to make sure LHS is collecting and sharing stories of the wide range of agricultural producers in Litchfield, especially in the 20th and 21st centuries. Several people referenced subdivision of

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<sup>4</sup> North and South streets are often referred to collectively and as shorthand for the past and present elite neighborhood. Meadow Street, on the other hand, is considered to be a more working-class street. They were separated by a long block until 2020 when LHS, whose Tapping Reeve House lot has frontage on both streets, opened the entire lot as a public space, halving the walking distance between South Street and Meadow Street.

farmland to keep families afloat during difficult economic times. They felt it was important to acknowledge that while farming has always been present in Litchfield, it is sometimes overshadowed.

Arethusa Farm was the most recent example referenced by nearly all community members. The fact that Arethusa is a nationally known agricultural enterprise with a long history seemed important. Arethusa Farm Foundation's recent gift of assets to the regional high school for the purpose of maintaining its agricultural land use status and to train its residents for agricultural careers was frequently mentioned (Leone, 2023).

### School district consolidation

Importantly, Arethusa Farm Foundation's relationship is with Regional School District 20. This district was created in 2022 after a public vote to consolidate Litchfield School District with Regional School District 6. This joining of local communities as a school district seemed to re-orient community feedback participants to their place in local geography and expand their ideas of what being from Litchfield means. These community members are adamant that LHS robustly record how this event plays out in their town and villages.

### Volunteerism

Many referenced the spirit of civic duty that kept and continues keeping the community together. Volunteer fire departments, local Red Cross chapters, village improvement societies, the Greenway, Housing Trust, and other groups were mentioned as recipients of participants' civic efforts, as well as being important elements of the community. Many stakeholders felt it was imperative to maintain recordkeeping of the long history of grassroots quality-of-life initiatives in Litchfield.

Litchfield's local government was also called out as a key player in the past, present, and future of the community. Nearly everyone (including LHS staff) referenced the Historic District Commission and the "sign warden." This body was mentioned to point out that "Litchfield doesn't look this way by accident." Some were appreciative, some frustrated, but all agreed that LHS should tell this story of historic preservation and village appearance through the present day.

### The young are at the gates<sup>5</sup>

Two important ideas about youth rose to the surface in community discussions. They are best summarized by these direct quotes: "Litchfield launched important people" and "The kids build the town."

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<sup>5</sup> This title for this section is adapted from suffragette Lavinia Dock's 1917 article in *The Suffragist*. The full idea is: "What is the potent spirit of youth? Is it not the spirit of revolt, of rebellion against senseless and useless and deadening things? Most of all, against injustice, which is of all stupid things the stupidest? ...The old stiff minds must give way. The old selfish minds must go. Obstructive reactionaries must move on. The young are at the gates!" Dock was from Pennsylvania, but Litchfield was home to its own suffragette - Isabella Beecher Hooker, who founded the Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association in 1869.

### “Litchfield launched important people.”

Community members referenced a lot of nationally significant people associated with Litchfield. Some of these were law school students, others were property owners and politicians, while others were artists and writers. Even while mentioning these folks, some of whom made a national impact while living in Litchfield (e.g. Tapping Reeve who founded America’s first law school), others were Litchfield residents for a short time before making their impact elsewhere as state governors, actors, writers, and Supreme Court justices. What seemed important about these notable figures, was that Litchfield had a part in shaping their futures, and by extension, the futures of others.

### “The kids build the town.”

The community member who said this quote was actually referencing the mosaic floor map in the Museum building (see the ‘Experiences over Objects’ section of this report) where kids place building blocks on the floor map, but the idea is resonant. Community feedback participants spoke of young people (past and present) as crucial to Litchfield’s story. Those with children, and ones without, mentioned the employment and internship opportunities that LHS offers to local young people as important to personal development and a way to be involved in the community. The Facebook page and oral histories are seen as a way to re-engage folks who spent teenage years in Litchfield but later moved away to another place where their impact on society may be more keenly felt.

Notably, community members wanted to ensure that LHS was engaging young people *on their own terms*. This idea resonated in the focus group and in conversations with other collecting organizations as crucial to keeping historical societies alive and relevant. They felt that young people should have a hand in directly shaping their own engagement with the collections and participation in programs.

## Implications and Potential Directions

The section offers potential options for developing LHS’s collection. It addresses each theme of the research findings and suggests some points to consider in developing the collection in ways that resonate with the current and future communities.

### People are Paramount

LHS may have a stronger relationship with its community than most other historical societies. It is abundantly clear that the organization is important as a local actor and almost a citizen in and of itself. Unlike with larger organizations, there is a significant sense of belonging from the ground up, underscored by contributions of time, objects and records, and financial support from community stewards and volunteers. The idea that when parts of stories are missing, the community, rather than the organization, is to blame is a rare one in the museum field; usually, the institution is to blame. To this end, collecting stories of social contributors, either as oral histories, digital or physical records, and illustrating them with objects, as opposed to collecting examples of types of items produced in Litchfield, is of the greatest importance.

### Acquisitions can be events

The organization could make each contribution to the Collection a significant public information event by posting the transaction on social media, in a newsletter, in a press release, or other media platforms. The story could focus equally on what was collected as on the person making the contribution. Recording and sharing the story of the acquisition process as well as the story the object tells can drive home the significance of the acquisition and an opportunity to share its relevance to the mission.

### Reduce collecting scope by focusing on makers

LHS could focus more on creators than owners. For example, rather than collecting objects owned by important people in Litchfield, only do so if the item was also made locally; whether a piece of furniture, a painting, a building, a novel, a law, a revolution, or educated students, this approach encourages a story about the social impact of an individual. Litchfield residents are less focused on aesthetics and more focused on objects that narrate stories. This may seem obvious as LHS is an historical society, but when significant decorative and fine art objects were created in a community, connoisseurship can become a focus. Indeed, fine and decorative arts are consistently listed first in a long line of object categories, giving those types of objects more primacy, intentionally or unintentionally. While this more circumspect scope risks creating a false sense of insularity or self-sufficiency, it is a defensible way to narrow the quantity of items in Museum collection so that it remains sustainable, especially in a community with such a strong history of production.

### Create collecting guidelines for “launched people”

While the 2012 CMP identified published works by Litchfield Law School graduates as a collecting focus, this may not be a practical goal. Further, given the large number of notables who were born in or spent some of their lives in Litchfield, focusing only on the white-male lawyer population would neglect the community desire to tell more diverse stories of the people from the local area. LHS may benefit from collecting scope guidelines for the acquisition of materials related to people who became famous or continued their social impact work after leaving Litchfield, as opposed to those who continued to operate (or are still practicing) within Litchfield as their primary or secondary residence. The community certainly holds a good amount of pride in Litchfield’s notables, but if choices must be made between collecting materials relating to the School District 20 consolidation and the jurisprudence treatises of 18th and 19th century law school graduates, local stories are likely to be more valuable to the community for the long term.

## Experiences with objects and archives

As noted, nearly everyone referenced experiences with LHS rather than specific objects or archives. The experiences were both organized (exhibition openings and walking tours) and impromptu (sitting alone in the law office, walking through the meadow from South Street to Meadow Street, watching kids use the mosaic floor map, conversations in a gallery or archive reading room).

This resonant connection to a museum or its collections through movement and interaction is often called experiential learning or embodied cognition. This idea refers to physical, gestural, or artifact-mediated experiences that enable generative learning (Vossoughi et al., 2021). These interactions in museum space can hold multiple interpretations and are often creative and improvisational (Vossoughi et al., 2021). Some theorists point out that museums have historically been very interested in studying and controlling visitors (overtly through specific pathways on a tour, or covertly through optional interactives) in a space that isn't necessarily planned for them - especially in larger museums driven by curatorial viewpoint and exhibition schedules (Christofalou, 2021; Harris, 2015). Though scholars have written about embodied cognition in museums since at least 2007, many organizations are still producing exhibitions that ask visitors to stand and silently look, as if visitors' bodies do not even exist (Christofalou, 2021; Harris, 2015; Hubbard, 2007). However, museums present the perfect environment to engage in experiential learning because they are contextually rich and can offer spaces for critical reflection on specific problems (Morris, 2020).

Litchfield's community seems to have already understood what many museums yet do not - that engaging with other people, in time and space, to solve problems is a fulfilling way to learn. Most respondents referenced experiences with others that involved multiple senses or referenced multi-sensory learning (dancing, singing, eating, etc.) when asked what they wished was at LHS. LHS's adult community is already engaging in makeshift experiential learning; try to imagine what might happen if those experiences were intentionally scaffolded as part of everyday museum visits! This is not to say that LHS's education staff does not already do this very well with K-12 audiences, but the adults who participated in community engagement sessions were describing ad-hoc and impromptu embodied learning that could be better supported and formalized. It is even possible that the community might benefit from exhibitions that were less "produced" and more so structured for inference or episodic, disconnected, engagement with Litchfield stories.

### Multimodal collections; collections in use

LHS already maintains a hands-on collection that is used in education and public programs. To further enrich visitor experience and provide additional context, it may consider using (under preservation guidelines it develops) collection objects as part of regular exhibitions and programs. This activation will be especially impactful in cases when objects lose much of their meaning when dormant. Objects in this category include musical instruments, clocks, audio and video recordings, and other mechanical tools. Experiences with archives that can be read aloud or sung(!) by visitors or those which ask visitors to follow textual instructions to use their bodies could be excellent ways to activate archives and visitors. Community members are already doing these things outside the museum on walking tours or in the

meadow and those are the most resonant and lasting memories. Community members talk about feeling and hearing, not about reading when they recall LHS experiences; experimenting with delivering visitors more of what they're already doing may yield a new level and method of engagement.

## Tell stories

This section addresses community desire to hear more stories in two ways. First, it suggests that LHS approaches its entire collection and collecting activities from a narrative perspective. Second, while community members were able to be quite specific about what they wanted to see at LHS, their categories aligned closely with those identified in the 'Collection Development' section of the 2012 CMP (agriculture, historically marginalized communities, schools, artists, etc.). Either LHS has been too quiet about its activities in these areas or the community does not consider the additions to be the right objects to address these themes. To address future collecting areas in a different way that may better meet community needs, entirely new collection categories are suggested.

## Put stories first

As noted, community members remember stories and want to hear more of them! To help the community understand that LHS does, indeed, collect great stories, reframing how the collection is described could help meet that need.

### *Describe the narratives, not the format*

To support the idea that collections tell stories, restructure the scope of collection statement in the CMP along interpretive themes, rather than object format or curatorial department subdivision. For example, one community member recounted the story of melting down the Battery Park King George statue and transporting it to a Litchfield foundry to make bullets for the Continental Army. They didn't seem to particularly care if that story is told through paintings, bullets, guns, statue pieces, account books, a wagon wheel, or manuscript letters. While the museum field, other professionals, and funders may care how many microfilm reels, sideboards, photographs, or shoes the museum holds, the public does not. When asked what the museum should be collecting, they identified "fishing" or "farming" not early 20th century fly fishing rods, sportsmans' catalogs, or records of the fish populations of Bantam Lake. The only specific formats mentioned were oral histories and store signs; oral histories are fundamentally stories anyway.

### *Give narrative center stage in collection development decisions*

When considering acquisition and deaccession of objects and archival materials, rather than focusing on representativeness, connoisseurship, quality, or relation to the region, ask instead, "what fundamental Litchfield stories are told by this material or illustrated by this object?" or, "how does this material object help tell a Litchfield story in ways our existing holdings do not?" When thinking about the long history of Litchfield -- and that history is still happening -- it will be critical to ensure that all objects contribute to compelling narratives. In other words, just because Silas Cheney made it, does not mean it should be in the collection. Or, just because a law school graduate wrote it, does not mean it should take up shelf space in the library.

### Conceptual reorganization

These categories are akin to interpretive themes and transcend format, medium, and time. They directly address community desires for LHS's collection and can help the organization create sustainable collecting scopes for each category. The categories could be assigned by tagging existing records or including a collection designation as part of an acquisition process.

#### *Made in Litchfield*

Objects and archives in this collection must have been made in Litchfield. This new collection category can include stellar examples of the creative and innovative output of Litchfield, CT. Existing objects and archival materials that might fit this category include:

- Silas Cheney furniture
- Ralph Earl portraits of Litchfield residents
- Work of contemporary local artists
- Examples of local factory-produced products (e.g., bearings)

LHS could serve as a quasi-art association. One respondent mentioned seeing the Litchfield artists show that was up during the 2023 season. That same person also commented that the Litchfield community has inconsistently provided infrastructure to support creators. Galleries and an arts council (or other similar group) have struggled to find footing in the community. Given the long history of renowned artists and makers in the area already represented in the collection, it may not be outside the scope of LHS's mission to provide more support to these makers. Certainly, it can collect or continue to collect work of contemporary artists in the community. It might consider hosting an arts show and adding the audience favorite to the collection, for example. Ideas like this support creative practice and directly involve the community in collection development decisions.

#### *Launched by Litchfield*

Materials in this category are those that illustrate the stories of people who spent some formative time in Litchfield but their significant social impact did not occur while they were living there. This collection would include works by and materials related to law school and female academy students and other notables and creators who were shaped by time spent in Litchfield but didn't reside there during their most significant period of impact.

#### *Litchfield stories and people*

As noted, whenever possible, focus collecting on people rather than object format or materials. While the 2012 CMP and even community respondents were interested in stories about farming and agriculture, it might be more effective to focus on farmers and agricultural workers rather than on land use patterns or agriculture as a whole. This pivot would direct attention from "the Arethusa Farm phenomenon" to the owners and employees as people and community members. Using Arethusa as an example, the collection might spotlight the Webster family as original historic owners and then the many identities of the 21st century owners George Malkemus and Anthony Yurgaitis who were "footwear executives" and members of the LGBTQAI+ community that wanted to save the agricultural land but were not themselves farmers (Gariano, 2021; Green, 2021). Collections can

illustrate the stories of the other local dairy farms from whom Arethusa purchases milk for its value-added products like ice cream.

### The young are at the gates

A good part of Litchfield's history is essentially about young people. Today, about 20% of Litchfield's population is under 21 (United States Census Bureau, 2021). The enrolled school-age population is slightly less white (87.98%) than the adult population and students identifying as Hispanic or Latino are the largest non-White population at 7.93% (Edsight, n.d.-a); Regional School District 6, with whom Litchfield School District is merging to form Regional School District 20, is less diverse (89.99% white, 5.42% Hispanic or Latino) (Edsight, n.d.-b).

LHS could use the school district consolidation as an opportunity to connect young people with Litchfield's rich education including the Litchfield Law School and Litchfield Female Academy that essentially educated teenagers and twenty-somethings. While many of them became culturally important adults, their experience of Litchfield was as a student.

The school district consolidation may prove to be a watershed moment that also consolidates the identities of the villages in the town of Litchfield. Recording past and present experiences with education in Litchfield (including regional private schools) could help the community process the change while adding important narratives to the collection.

Further, survival of LHS and other regional collecting organizations depend on engagement of younger audiences. Responding collaborator organizations did reference, sometimes in passing, sometimes directly, the somewhat friable nature of village historical organizations and the desire that LHS provide additional technical assistance or even storage should the organizations be unsustainable. Engaging the next generation of history stewards now may help to stave off that eventuality. Creating a community of history stewards is one way to enact 's collection development ideal.

Further, the following are possible methods for engaging young people in the collection:

- Invite young people to participate in collection development.
- Add a youth representative to the Collections Committee.
- Include voices of teenagers in exhibits by inviting label copy or participation in object selection.
- Collect objects that connect young people of yesterday to young people of today.
- Further research population demographics of the time of the Law School. Focus some collection development activities on the student experience and less on the lawyers, judges, and community leaders they became later.
- Engage in intergenerational collecting initiatives related to the school district consolidation.
- Intentionally collect materials related to the long history of private education in Litchfield - including the multiple boarding schools in the region.



## Resources Consulted

### Interviews and focus groups

#### *LHS Staff*

- Linda Hocking, Archivist
- Alex Dubois, Curator
- Kate Zullo, Head of Education
- Jessica Jenkins, Executive Director
- Sean Kunic, Visitor Services

#### *Stakeholders at other regional collecting organizations*

- Dick Sheldon - Bantam Historical
- Eileen Schmidt - East Litchfield Village Improvement Society and American Legion Post 27
- Ed Dorsett and Lee Cook - Morris Historical

#### *Community engagement participants*

- Charlie Champaulimaud
- John Kilbourn
- Al Coffill

#### *Focus group*

- Five community members participated anonymously in one focus group.

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## APPENDIX B: Guiding Principles & Narrative Areas

### Guiding Principles:

The Historical Society will emphasize documentation of:

- The stories of underrepresented people including those of women, enslaved and Black residents, Indigenous Peoples, people of color, the LGBTQIA+ community, and other communities historically excluded from collecting and record keeping practices
- All geographical areas of the town of Litchfield, historically and today
- Stories from the town of Litchfield's past and present

### Narratives:

The Society will focus collecting in these narrative areas:

- The Land: Documentation of land use and the built environment may include agriculture, land use and change over time, land preservation and conservation, and the town's response to climate change.
- Makers: Stories of industry, craftspeople, and artists (including visual, written, and performance art), commemorating the rich and continued history of individuals who created the essentials and comforts of life in the region.
- Education: This theme centers on the local, state, and national impact of Litchfield's educational institutions including the Litchfield Female Academy, Litchfield Law School, and other private schools, as well as the evolution of public education in Litchfield.
- Perspectives: Collecting will be inclusive of the LGBTQIA+ community; all cultural traditions; all races; all genders; all economic classes; and all ages of Litchfield residents.
- Movement: Stories of arrival, departure, migration, immigration, removal, and community building, from the Indigenous inhabitants of Northwest Connecticut to those later settling in Litchfield and the town's modern population.
- Impact: Litchfield served as the starting point for many individuals who made significant contributions elsewhere in the state and outside the region. From legal minds trained at the Law School to settlers traveling to the Western Reserve, Litchfield incubated change-makers.

## **APPENDIX C: Areas of Targeted/Limited/Negative Growth**

This list is meant to identify areas within the existing collections that:

- are of insufficient depth or quality to support the Society's mission and interpretive goals (**targeted**);
- are well represented but would better support the Society's mission and interpretive goals through the addition of select objects or materials (**limited**);
- do not support the Society's mission or interpretive goals; or offer clear opportunities for refinement and deaccessioning (**negative**).

The list is by no means complete or inclusive of all collections currently held at the Society. This document is meant to change over time as the Society works towards the goals outlined in the Collection Development Plan.

**Areas of Targeted Growth:**

**Areas of Limited Growth:**

**Areas of Negative Growth:**