

Amesbury Carriage Museum
Collecting Interests and Acquisition Procedures
Approved – June 16, 2017

Overview

The following narrative outlines the process of acquiring materials for the ACM permanent collection. This is a working document – and will be adjusted as needed. It was prepared by John Mayer, Executive Director, reviewed by the Collections Committee, and presented to the ACM Board of Directors. On June 16, 2017 these procedures were approved by the ACM Board of Directors.

This document was written for donors, staff, trustees, and volunteers and can be shared with the public.

Statement of Policy

The Board of Directors of the Amesbury Carriage Museum is responsible for the care of objects in the museum collections. The Board establishes policies for the management of the collections and approves the criteria for collecting.

The Executive Director is authorized to make decisions to accept objects for the collections that do not require special care or expense for their acquisition or storage. Any acquisition that requires special care or expense will be reviewed by the Collections Committee and if in agreement, presented to the Board of Directors for approval.

The procedures outlined in this document are those used by staff to ensure the standards intended by those policies are upheld.

Core Principles

Professional museum standards inform these acquisition and accessioning procedures. Organizations such as the American Alliance of Museums and the American Institute for Conservation are important sources for reference.

When reviewing potential additions to the collection, there are several fundamental considerations –

1. A clear and documented understanding “why” an object should be acquired,
2. Securing documentation regarding the history of the object,
3. Certainty regarding the ability to care for and provide access to the material,
4. Clarity regarding donor interests and intent, and
5. Ability to catalog materials and complete administrative procedures.

These considerations influence decisions to collect an object or not, and are part of conversations with the owner. Information is openly exchanged and is an essential and vital part of the accessioning process.

What does the Amesbury Carriage Museum collect?

Traditionally the ACM has focused on carriages and sleighs. Currently there are approximately 24 horse-drawn vehicles in the collection and a small assortment of accessories.

The Board of Directors has developed a new mission statement with a general interest in the history of Amesbury industries, its' people, and the nature of worklife in the city and surrounding region.

With that in mind, the ACM will collect: ***objects with a documented history to the Amesbury region and a connection to industries, workers and their families, and related social activities.***

Museum materials may be aesthetic, commemorative, documentary, or related to other collections. Museum objects are collected because they provide unique insights into the history of Amesbury and the region, document a rich and descriptive human story, and support the ACM mission and programs.

The Acquisition Process

1. Determine Why an Object or Collection is of Interest

The acquisition process is initiated in many different ways and can involve donations, purchases, transfers, and even exchanges. In every case – the fundamental issue is establishing clarity about the purpose of the acquisition and the relationship of the materials to ACM collecting interests.

A core belief is that *Collecting by the ACM is deliberate and purposeful and supports the ACM mission.*

Establishing a basis for any acquisition involves many considerations. And every situation is unique. It will not be possible to outline or anticipate every circumstance. None the less, the responsibility to document the process is critical – and developing an “Acquisition Prospectus” must be a standard procedure.

A Note about Loans: Loans require special consideration and will be addressed in a separate policy. As a matter of principle, the ACM does not borrow objects for an indefinite period or without a specific use for a short term exhibit or program.

2. Preparing an *Acquisition Prospectus*

This document serves to capture basic information and is part of the permanent record of the object. Recorded on the document are key groups of information:

The Owner and contact information:

1. The owner's name or the source of the material.
2. Any contact information including address, phone and email.
3. Background information about the object and its provenance and history.
4. Physical details about each object – including size, materials, condition.

When appropriate, a determination of associations to other people, collections or events:

1. Who is associated with the object, who made it, how was it used.
2. A list of any other associated object or locations.

Other information:

1. There can often be additional information that is provided by the donor. This document is flexible and adjusted as needed by the process. The donor can offer their own history of the object and its' importance to Amesbury.

A summary and a justification for collecting:

1. Provide a statement outlining the basis for the acquisition.

3. Determine the Ability to Care for the Acquisition

In addition to understanding the object and its history – it is essential that the condition of the object be considered before a decision is made to accept it. Associated with this stage in the process is the principle that *ACM will be able to properly care for its collections.*

Many considerations are part of this process including determination of the materials and physical qualities of the object, stability of the object, the design and configuration of housing systems, and storage needs.

In some cases because of the size or condition – a collection or object may exceed standard capacities of care. The Collection Committee and/or Board of Trustees can be engaged to support a decision to collect – or the object can be rejected.

4. Communications with Donor

Maintaining communications with the donor is essential for the collecting process. Sharing drafts of the *Acquisition Prospectus* ensures collection information is accurate. Discussing what to do with material not collected is critical and prevents problems with managing unwanted objects or misunderstandings with owners.

Donors who are able to do so are encouraged to assist in meeting costs associated with preserving, conserving, and processing collections. Creating open and transparent communications with donors serves ACM by building positive relationships and can lead to additional acquisitions.

5. Collection Administration

Before a decision to collect an object is made, an *Acquisition Prospectus* should be completed. It is best practice to complete this BEFORE an object is delivered to ACM. This may not always be possible. The donor must be aware that if the object is declined it will be returned, or they should provide other disposition options.

Once an object is collected, the object is numbered and placed in storage.

The Executive Director signs the Certificate of Gift on behalf of the Board of Trustees and the CoG is sent to the donor for signing. Once the CoG is fully executed, the object officially becomes part of the collection and a “thank you” letter is sent to the donor.

All collection information is kept in an object file.

Summary – Sequence of Actions

1. Acquisition opportunity presented to ACM.
2. ACM representative contacts or meets with owner to verify information about interest – Donation or purchase? Confirm their intent and the material they are offering.
3. The object is left with ACM – a *Temporary Deposit* receipt is provided.
4. Director researches acquisition – develops *Acquisition Prospectus*. Collection Committee makes decision to collect.
- 5a. If determination is made to reject – the owner is contacted and object returned, transferred or disposed.
- 5b. If determination is to collect – the object is cleaned, imaged and placed in housing, and a storage location identified and prepared.
6. Donor is informed.
7. *Certificate of Gift* generated - Executive Director and donor signs CoG.
8. Object numbered and moved to storage. Object file created.