Museum Collections Management Policy
The Farmers' Museum, Inc.

Adopted by the Board of Directors,
July 17, 2003

Table of Contents

Purpose ***3***

Scope, Use and Management of Collections ***5***

Authority and Responsibility “ ***7***

Acquisition and Accessioning ***8***

Deaccessioning and Disposal ***11***

Incoming Loans **13**

Outgoing Loans **14**

Temporary Custody of Objects ***16***

Access to Collections and Collections Information ***18***

Risk Management and Security ***19***

Collections Records ***20***

Monitoring and Compliance ***21***

Policy Review ***22***

I. **Purpose.** The Farmers' Museum is a non-profit educational institution located in Cooperstown, New York, dedicated to the interpretation of American rural life and culture, especially as typified in central New York. The Farmers' Museum cooperates closely with the New York State Historical Association, an independent non-profit organization that operates the adjacent Fenimore Art Museum. The Farmers' Museum actively participates in the Cooperstown Graduate Program, a two-year master's degree program offered by the State University of New York College at Oneonta and co-sponsored by the Association. The Farmers' Museum and the Association also operate a Research Library which supports the missions of both museums and the graduate program.

In furtherance of its charter and mission The Farmers' Museum acquires, manages, preserves and uses objects. This document establishes the professional policies under which the Museum manages the museum objects and photograph collections under its care. This document does not apply to collections owned or cared for by the New York State Historical Association, or to the library and archival collections managed by the Research Library.

Charter.

***The Farmers' Museum received an absolute charter from the Board of Regents April 16, 1943*.**

The charter purposes of the Museum are:
--to promote the welfare of the inhabitants of, and the improvement of conditions in, one or more rural communities and towns in the State of New York;
--to study farm and rural community life; to stimulate an interest in and to promote better farm methods, and better farming and rural conditions; to study and promote better methods in agriculture and in the care and breeding of livestock;
--to collect and acquire …implements, utensils, tools, equipment, books, furniture, furnishings, and other articles or devices, of American farms and rural communities, and to preserve and exhibit the same in such a manner as to be accessible to all interested therein; to acquire, establish, equip, maintain and operate a museum or museums, a repository or repositories for the care, preservation and display thereof;
--to create and dedicate a memorial or memorials to a person or persons selected by the corporation;
--to create and set up exhibits of the crafts and of the activities of American farm and community life;

--to stimulate an interest in, and study of, American farm and community life;
--and to publish and distribute articles, manuscripts, reports, booklets and photographs pertaining to farm and rural life.

Mission. ***Adopted by the Board of Directors July 9, 1998***.

The Farmers' Museum is a private educational institution, serving the public, that is dedicated to representing American rural life as typified in central New York by preserving the past, recording the present and educating for the future.

II. **Scope, Use and Management of Collections**

The Museum collects items relating to its purposes as stated in its Charter Purposes and Mission (see above)

Scope of Collections. The Museum seeks to maintain and continually develop culturally and historically significant collections. In particular, the Museum focuses its collecting activities on the following:

Farm tools and implements, especially those representative of the agricultural history of central New York, from the colonial period to date.

Craft and industrial tools and equipment representative of rural and village industry in central New York.

Historic structures typical of central New York farmsteads and rural villages.

Decorative arts and material culture representative of central New York village and rural life.

D. **Use of the Collections.** The Museum collects for both *documentary* and *teaching* purposes.

B. The *Documentary Collection* consists of original, rare, and often irreplaceable historical and art objects to be preserved for future generations. Many of these objects have a known provenance that imparts intrinsic value to an object. Objects in the *Documentary Collection* may be used for research and exhibition. The Museum avoids using documentary objects in any way that is detrimental to their preservation.

C. The *Teaching Collection* consists of facsimile reproductions, adaptations, modern reproductions, restorations, and some period artifacts. Period artifacts may be placed in this category provided that a duplicate or closely similar object is represented in the Museum's *Documentary Collection* or in the collection of a comparable institution. Teaching objects are chosen for their usefulness in interpretive and education programs; they are intentionally released for handling and use with the understanding that this will shorten the life of the objects.

DI. Management of the Collections.

Objects in the *Documentary Collection* are accessioned, cataloged and tracked by collections staff. They may be removed from the collection only through the deaccession process delineated in this policy.

Objects in the *Teaching Collection* are registered, cataloged and tracked by collections staff. They are not accessioned because they are acquired for use and handling rather than preservation. They do not go through the deaccession process when they are no longer useful for teaching purposes, but their removal from the *Teaching Collection* is recorded by the Registrar..

Documentary Collection objects may only be transferred to the *Teaching Collection* through the deaccession process.

4. *Teaching Collection* objects may be transferred to the *Documentary Collection* through the accession process.

III. **Authority and Responsibility.**

A. The Board of Directors has the fiduciary responsibility for the protection of assets of the Museum, including the collections. The board is also required to ensure that the collections are carefully preserved, and properly and effectively used for public, educational purposes. This document, as adopted by the Board of Directors, establishes general policies governing the acquisition, ownership and use of collections.

B. The Board of Directors delegates authority for the implementation of this policy to the President. The President shall delegate various authorities and responsibilities to the Chief Curator and the collections staff as deemed necessary.

C. The Curator of Collections maintains a procedural manual for the management of all collections in accordance with this policy.

D. The Head of Security maintains the Museum's Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan and consults regularly with Curatorial staff to keep the provisions relating to the collections up to date.

E. The Museum shall adhere to the Code of Ethics of the American Association of Museums (AAM), the Statement of Professional Standards and Ethics (American Association for State and Local History) and the American Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC).

F. The Board of Directors has adopted a Code of Ethics for the Museum that mandates high standards for board and staff members in all areas of operation, including collections management.

Acquisition and Accessioning

A. **Methods:** Objects may be acquired by purchase, commission, bequest, gift, specified purpose or loan or deposit, exchange, field collection, excavation, levy by creditors, abandonment, reversionary clause, and adverse possession. Objects may be acquired only in accordance as authorized by this policy and only when consistent with applicable law and professional ethics. All applicable federal, state, local and international laws, treaties, regulations, and conventions will be observed in the acquisition process and compliance documented as required. All rights, title, and interest shall be obtained by the Museum for all potential acquisitions, without restrictions or limiting conditions if possible, or shall have the potential of being converted to free and clear title under appropriate law.

B. **Criteria:** Objects considered for the museum collections must meet all of the following tests of acquisition before being acquired by the Museum by any means:

1. The present owner must have clear title.
2. If for sale, the staff must arrange funding before purchase.
3. If for sale, a fair market value must be determined between the parties.
4. The Museum must be in a position to care properly for the proposed acquisition.
5. The significance of the material or objects must be determined.
6. The objects must, if possible, be documented as to provenance.
7. All known moral, legal, and ethical implications of the acquisition must have been addressed.
8. If possible, no acquisitions will be encumbered by less than full literary rights, property rights, copyrights, patents or trademarks, or by obscene or physically hazardous attributes.
9. Acquisition must, in general, be free from donor imposed restrictions.

C. **Acquisition of culturally sensitive objects:**

The Museum subscribes to the provisions of the UNESCO Convention of 1970. The Museum shall refuse to acquire objects where there is cause to believe that the circumstances of their collection involve the destruction of historic sites, buildings, structures, habitats, districts, and objects.

It is the policy of the Museum to collect, care for, and interpret materials in an ethical manner that respects the diversity of cultures and religions. The Museum recognizes that it also holds a fiduciary responsibility for the care and interpretation of its collections and complies with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

1. Procedures:

1. The President is authorized to accept objects for the Documentary Collection and the Teaching Collection in conformation with the Charter and Mission of the Museum and with the Collecting Objectives approved by the Board of Directors (see IV.A. above), with the exception that the purchase of objects or collections having a value of $5,000.00 or more requires the prior approval of the Executive Committee.
2. Funds for purchase of museum objects must be secured prior to acquisition, either within annual budgets approved by the Board of Directors or from other sources.

   No staff member may obligate the Museum to the acceptance of any material or object not consonant with this policy.

   The President will report all accessions to the Documentary and Teaching collections for formal ratification by the Board of Directors at their next meeting.

E. **Appraisals:** No staff or board member shall offer appraisals or the monetary value of objects to donors, or reveal the Museum's insurance value, for the purpose of establishing a fair market value of gifts offered to the Museum. Donors desiring to take an income tax deduction must obtain an independent appraisal. Staff or board members may assist a donor in locating a qualified appraiser from a list of appraisers maintained by the Museum. Staff or board members will not

appraise or otherwise place a monetary value on objects casually brought to the Museum.

Deaccessioning and Disposal.

A. **Purpose:** In order to maintain the collection in accordance with the Museum's mission and charter purposes it may be necessary or desirable to dispose of certain objects. The deaccession process shall be cautious, deliberate, and scrupulous. The deaccession and disposition process will be thoroughly and uniformly documented and undertaken in accordance with current professional standards and ethics. Records of the object and the process will be retained by the Museum.

B. **Criteria:** Museum objects to be considered for deaccession must meet at least one of the following criteria:

a. Does not fall within the scope of the charter purpose of the Museum.
b. Does not fall within the current scope of the Museum's collections criteria and policy.
c. Has deteriorated beyond usefulness, is damaged beyond repair or its condition endangers other artifacts in the collection.
d. Is a hazard to the safety of staff and/or visitors.
e. The object's authenticity or identity has been firmly refuted.
f. Cannot be properly preserved by the Museum.
g. Duplicates one or more objects in the collections that are of higher quality and does not serve an alternative use or research purpose.
h. The artifact can be exchanged with another institution or individual in return for an object or objects of greater significance to the collection.
i. The artifact is subject to repatriation under the provisions of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

C. **Deaccession Proposals and Decisions**:

1. Curators may propose the deaccession of objects that meet one or more of the deaccession criteria listed above.
2. The Chief Curator submits a deaccession proposal for each item to the President. The proposal contains the following information: date of proposal; accession number of object; name and brief description of object; name and address of source; date of acquisition; reason for deaccession; limiting conditions agreed to at the time of acquisition; reasons for accepting limiting conditions; book,

insurance, and estimated market values; proposed method of disposal and agent.

3. The President will reply in writing, approving or disapproving and designating the means of disposal.
4. The President will submit each proposed deaccession to the Executive Committee of the Board for approval. Objects that pose a hazard to the safety of visitors, staff or the collections may be approved for deaccession after receiving verbal approval from the Executive Committee. All deaccessions will be reported in writing and formally ratified at the next meeting of the Board of Directors.

D. **Disposal of Deaccessioned Objects:**

Deaccessioned objects shall not be given, sold, or otherwise transferred, publicly or privately, to employees, officers or board members of the Museum or the New York State Historical Association, or to their immediate families or representatives.

Disposal of deaccessioned objects is solely for the advancement of the Museum's mission. Proceeds from the sale of collections are to be used only for acquisition or, with Board approval, direct care of collections. All proceeds resulting from the deaccession of objects from the Museum's collections shall be deposited to the Acquisitions Fund.

The President will choose an appropriate method of disposal for each deaccessioned object. Deaccessioned objects may be

sold at auction, by open or sealed bid;
sold through private negotiation;
exchanged for objects that meet the Museum's acquisition criteria and have been approved for acquisition by the proper authority;
given or sold to another museum;
transferred to the *Teaching Collection*;
f) destroyed if its condition warrants.

E. **Deaccession Records:**

The Registrar will maintain a deaccession log as well as a permanent file on each deaccessioned object.

The deaccession files should include copies of all acquisition and cataloging records on each deaccessioned object, as well as a copy of the deaccession proposal, and records of the approval of the deaccession by the President and the Board of Directors, the disposal of the object and any funds received from the disposal of the object.

Loans.

a) **Incoming**: The Museum may borrow objects for exhibitions, education programs or study that fulfill its Mission and Charter Purposes.

The Museum will examine the relationship of potential lenders to determine if there are potential conflicts of interest, or the appearance of conflict. The Museum will take steps to avoid real or perceived conflict of interest regarding borrowed objects.

The Museum will not accept any commission or fee from the sale of objects borrowed for exhibition, unless such exhibition was explicitly organized for the sale of those objects.

The Museum retains full decision making authority over the content and presentation of exhibitions, but may consult with lenders on the significance of borrowed objects in the exhibition.

4. The Museum shall afford borrowed objects with the same care and security as that given its own collection. Care for borrowed objects is the responsibility of the Curatorial department.
5. All loans shall be for a specified period of time, not to exceed one year without review and renewal. The Museum will not retain borrowed objects in long-term storage.

b) **Procedures**:

Curators may submit incoming loan proposals to a loan committee that includes the President, Chief Curator, Conservator, and other curator(s) for the collection involved. Such proposals should be made as far in advance of the date needed as possible. Negotiations for borrowing by the Museum must be completed and approved by the loan committee at least 60 days before the objects arrive at the Museum.

Upon approval of the loan, the Registrar completes and executes all forms and their filing, arranges insurance coverage, and registers all incoming and outgoing objects; the Registrar supervises packing and transport of all artifacts. Loan records are placed in a transaction file.

Contracts for borrowing objects will be executed on the Museum's incoming loan agreement form, unless an institution requires use of its loan form for lending its collections. Loan forms from *both* parties to a loan will not be executed under any circumstances.

C. Outgoing: The Museum collects objects to fulfill its Mission and Charter Purposes. The Museum may make its collections available on loan for legitimate educational purposes. Collections will be loaned only to qualified museums, educational or other institutions, to qualified conservators, or to individuals or corporations engaged by the Museum to produce replicas or adaptations of collections objects. Loans will be approved only if arrangements have been made for the safe custody, exhibition and handling of the collection item(s).

D. Objects shall be considered for loan only if all of the conditions are met:

IV. The object is not currently on exhibition and will not be needed for exhibition or educational purposes during the proposed loan period. Objects of particular rarity will not be loaned.

V. The object is in stable condition and will not be damaged by shipment, exhibition or any other educational use proposed by the borrower.

VI. The object is not used for purposes other than static exhibition or study unless approval for other uses is recommended by the responsible curator and approved by the Chief Curator and President.

VII. The borrowing institution provides proof of insurance coverage and its ability to safeguard the object while in transit and during exhibition or other approved use, in accord with acceptable professional museum standards. Loan requests should be accompanied by a completed facilities report.

VIII. The object has been properly recorded and documented by the Museum's staff and bears an identification number.

IX. A condition report is prepared prior to the loan and a copy accompanies the object to the borrower.

X. The borrowing institution agrees to promptly report any changes in stability, condition or use to the Museum's staff for assessment and treatment.

XI. All loans shall be for a specified period of time, not to exceed one year without review and renewal.

2. **Fees:** The Museum may charge borrowers a fee for each collections object loaned, on a fee schedule to be approved by the President and the Board of Directors.

3. **Procedures:**
   a. A loan request must be made in writing. It should include name, address, telephone and fax numbers, and contact person of the borrowing institution, purpose and time period of the loan.
   b. The Museum's loan agreement form will be the contract document for all outgoing loans of artifacts from the collections. Loan requests are reviewed by a curator, the Conservator, and the Chief Curator and must be approved by the President.
   c. A semi-annual report to the Board will be made on all loan activity.

Temporary Custody of Objects.

Objects may be placed in the temporary custody of the Museum, the period of which may not exceed 90 days, for the purposes of research, identification, consideration for acquisition into the collections, or evaluation for loan. Placement of an object in the temporary custody of the Museum does not constitute a transfer of legal title to the Museum.

All temporary deposits are subject to the conditions set forth on the reverse of the Temporary Custody Receipt, which must be signed by the owner or owner's representative before the object is delivered to the Museum. Objects on temporary deposit will be stored properly and monitored; however, the Museum will not insure objects placed in its temporary custody, nor will it re-house, catalog, or make them available to researchers.

The Registrar assigns a Temporary Deposit Number to objects in temporary custody. The Registrar maintains a log of Temporary Deposits and indicates in the log when objects on deposit are either returned to their owners or added to the Museum's collections. The Registrar monitors the location of objects in the temporary custody of the Museum.

Preservation of Collections.

All objects in the Museum's documentary collections are subject to the current standards of professional care. To ensure consistency, the Curator of Collections and the Conservator, with significant input from curatorial staff, will issue general guidelines for the care of the collections. It is the responsibility of all collections staff to inform interns, volunteers, researchers, consultants, and vendors with whom they work about these policies, procedures, and guidelines, and ensure that they are followed.

Conservation action may only be taken by trained, professional conservators or other qualified individuals with guidance from the staff Conservator if required. Any treatment must respect the integrity of the object. Conservation treatment of the fabric of an object must include earlier repairs and modifications which, after examination and research, are found to be historically significant. Any new material added to the object must be minimal and must be compatible with the future welfare of the object. No action may be taken without a thorough technical examination of the object and a written proposal of treatment listing all possible treatment options. Each treatment proposal must be approved by the Chief Curator. Once treatment is undertaken, the conservator must provide a written report of all conservation actions that will be maintained in the object's Accession File and made available to

researchers and scholars upon request. Objects on loan to or from the Museum will not be repaired, cleaned or otherwise treated without written permission from the owner of the objects.

Access to Collections and Collections Information.

The Museum supports research using its collections and collections documentation, subject to any existing legal limitations and limits on the availability of staff and resources.

In keeping with the Museum's established security and curatorial practices, and in the interest of protecting the Museum and its staff from liability for damage or injury, the Museum's collections storage areas are closed to the general public. The President and Chief Curator will establish procedures for access to the collections storage areas, which will be monitored and documented by the Curator of Collections.

Collections staff will work with researchers who wish to access the Museum's collections and collections documentation and may also conduct in-house research for the purposes of curating exhibitions, producing exhibition and collections catalogs, and documenting collections. In providing physical access to collections, priority will be given to the needs of the Museum's curatorial and exhibition departments and to the faculty and students of the Cooperstown Graduate Program.

During normal operating hours, the collections shall be accessible for legitimate research and study by responsible individuals, subject to procedures necessary to safeguard the objects and to restrictions imposed by limitations of space and facilities, exhibition requirements, and availability of appropriate curatorial staff.

Collections personnel are responsible for handling requests for access to collections and collections documentation under their direct supervision.

The Museum expects that all researchers, both in-house and visiting, who make use of collections will adhere to any legal or ethical restrictions on research imposed by the Museum, and that they will operate in accordance with the generally accepted ethical standards of the field in which they are working.

The Museum respects the traditions of Native American Tribes and Canadian First Nations and recognizes the needs of their representatives for access to the American Indian Art collections.

The Museum may make collections data and images available for research and publication in print and electronic media, according to procedures developed by the staff and approved by the Chief Curator and President.

Risk Management and Security.

The Museum meets its mission of preservation through a program of risk management, which includes reducing risks to the collection, providing on-site security and retaining insurance policies against loss or damage to the collections.

The Museum retains fine arts insurance to provide for replacement or restoration of significant collections in the event of damage or loss. The President has the authority to contract for insurance and to authorize the degree of coverage for the Museum's collections objects as well as objects on loan to the Museum.

Insurance values will be based on the fair market value of the object as determined by the Museum's curatorial staff.

If Museum staff cannot provide an accurate insurance value or if the period of an outgoing loan is greater than one year, a professional outside appraisal may be required. For outgoing loans, the borrower may be charged for an outside appraisal.

The Registrar will maintain records of the book value of each object when accessioned, the current replacement value and the insurance value of each object. These records will indicate the date of each change in value and the staff member responsible for the change.

The Collections and Security staffs are responsible for monitoring the Museum's exhibition and storage areas on a routine basis to ensure the safest possible environment for collections and loaned objects.

The Curatorial and Security departments ensure that the Museum's Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan provides for the safety of the museum collections.

Museum staff must report damage to or loss of any object, as soon as discovered, to the President and the Security department, who will notify the Curator of Collections and relevant staff.

The President will provide appropriate information to police, other appropriate agencies, and the Board.

The Registrar will maintain all records relating to the investigation of missing or stolen objects. Duplicates of these records will be kept in the President's office.

The Museum shall conduct systematic inventories of its collections on a five-year cycle with annual spot checks.

Collections Records.

The Museum's staff creates and maintains documentation for all collections. These records establish legal title to collections, identify collections and their provenance as fully as possible, and track the location of collections objects.

The Registrar is responsible for creating and maintaining records of accessions, deaccessions, registered *Teaching* objects and loans. Accessions will be recorded in accession number order in a permanent Accession Register.

The Curator of Collections is responsible for creating and maintaining catalog records for all accessioned *Documentary* objects and all registered *Teaching* objects.

The primary purpose of collections records is control and documentation of the collections. Therefore, these records should provide at least the following information:

Object Name.
Title, if applicable.
Identifying description of object.
Assigned number.
Other identifying marks.
Legal status of object.
Condition of object.
Location of object.

The Curator of Collections will ensure that duplicate copies of accession, catalog, loan and deaccession records are maintained in a secure, off-site storage area.

Records access is subject to applicable public law. Collections staff are responsible for controlling and documenting access to collections records under their direct supervision. The following items of information are considered privileged:

Addresses of donors and lenders.
Location of objects.
Valuation of objects.
Identity of donors and lenders, if anonymity is requested.
Information that is restricted intellectual property.

Monitoring and Compliance.

The Chief Curator monitors compliance with this policy and reports lack of compliance to the President.

Upon adoption, all staff and board members will receive a copy of this policy.

All new staff and board members will receive a copy of this policy as part of their orientation to the Museum.

Policy Review.

The Chief Curator initiates review of the Museum Collections Management Policy by the Board of Directors and staff of the Museum, at least once every five years.

Definitions.

Accession: an object or group of objects obtained at one time from a single source.

Accessioning: the formal process used to accept and record an artifact as a collections object.

Acquisition: the discovery, preliminary evaluation, negotiation for, taking custody of, taking title to, and acknowledging receipt of materials and objects; or negotiating for and recording information about borrowed objects.

Book value: the initial monetary value assigned to a collections object at the time of acquisition.

Collections object: an item that has been or is in the process of being accessioned into the collections.

Deaccessioning: the process used to remove permanently an object from the museum's collection or to document the reasons for involuntary removal.

Disposal: The act of physically removing an object from the museum collection. See also: *deaccessioning*.

Documentary Collection: consists of original, rare, and often irreplaceable artifacts to be preserved for future generations.

Insurance Value: the current monetary value assigned to a collections object for insurance purposes.

Inventory: a) an itemized listing of collections objects that identifies the current physical location of each object; b) the process of physically locating all or a subset of objects for which the museum is responsible.

Loans: temporary assignments of collections objects from the museum or temporary assignments of similar objects to the museum for stated museum purposes, such as exhibition and research. These assignments do not involve a change in ownership.

Objects placed in the custody of the museum: items that are not owned by the museum but are left temporarily in the museum for other than loan purposes, such as for attribution, identification, or examination for possible gift or purchase.

Provenance: a history of ownership for an object that can be documented through written records and/or oral tradition.

Registering: the assignment of a tracking number to an object in the *Teaching Collection.*

Registration: The process of developing and maintaining an immediate, brief, and permanent means of identifying an object for which the institution has permanently or temporarily assumed responsibility.
Replacement value: the cost of acquiring an object similar or identical to a given collections object.
Teaching Collection: consists of facsimile reproductions, adaptations, modern reproductions, restorations and some period artifacts (if duplicated in the documentary collection).

Bibliography

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http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/charter/collections.html, 1999.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, **Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property**, 1970.

Collections Management Policies and other policy statements of the following museums:

Adirondack Museum, Blue Mountain Lake, NY.
Historical Center for the Health Sciences, Ann Arbor, MI.
Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Ann Arbor, MI.
MIT Museum, Cambridge, MA.
Museum of Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.
Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, CT.
Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, NE.
North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort, NC.
Nova Scotia Museum, Halifax, NS.
Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.
Yale Peabody Museum, New Haven, CT.