

COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY

ONEIDA COMMUNITY MANSION HOUSE

Amended and approved by the Board of Trustees, March 22, 2012.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide written policies covering all aspects of the acquisition, care, use and disposition of objects for which Oneida Community Mansion House (OCMH) is the permanent steward or temporary guardian. This document sets forth guidelines for the creation, maintenance, and use of the records for such objects, in accordance with the best practices for collections care and conservation recommended by the American Association of Museums (AAM).

It establishes the policies for accessions to the collection, for incoming and outgoing loans of objects and for maintaining inventory control. It specifies the circumstances and methods of deaccessioning objects from the collection and states the museum's policy concerning access to collections, objects and records. It recognizes the dual roles of accessibility and accountability.

I. MISSION

Using its historic site and collections, the non-profit Oneida Community Mansion House shares the story of the Oneida Community – one of the most radical and successful of the 19th-century social experiments – to explore pressing social issues that still confront audiences today.

To achieve our mission, we will:

1. Develop and use our collections and facilities for public exhibitions, tours, educational and interpretive programs, and special events that engage audiences of all ages in the examination of the societal impact and legacy of the Oneida Community
2. Publish original documents, research and related materials as a basis for educational programming, scholarly collaboration, and for enjoyment by the general public
3. Make available our site and collections for the benefit of scholars, students, and an interested public
4. Maintain and preserve the historical integrity of the Mansion House and its surrounding cultural landscape
5. Expand our collection of Oneida Community artifacts and related primary source material to create a more complete context for understanding the Oneida Community's history and impact as a social and economic model
6. Exercise responsible stewardship of resources in order to support and sustain our mission

II. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Oneida Community Mansion House is a non-profit, educational institution that was founded in 1987 to promote an understanding of the utopian, religious Oneida Community founded in the 19th century, how it became a modern corporation and how the history relates to the world of the 20th century.

In pursuit of the mission OCMH collects artifacts relating to the Oneida Community and its legacy, and cares for a permanent collection of objects, manuscripts, research material, and associated archives that are accessible through exhibitions, educational programs, publications, and direct examination. OCMH encourages intellectual inquiry into and interpretation of the Oneida Community by a diverse audience ranging from specialized scholars to members of the general public.

The collections are made up of the broad categories of furniture, clothing, decorative arts, paintings, works of art on paper, utilitarian objects, books, pamphlets, sheet music, ephemera and photographs. The inter-related nature of all of the collections is a primary concern.

OCMH serves a varied and interlocking constituency that is both local and national in scope. The history of the Mansion House is a source of pride for local residents and is an important component of local history as studied in the schools. Travelers touring through Central New York stop to learn about the importance of the religious and social upheaval that typified the "burned-over district" in the mid 19th century. Scholars of communal studies and of religious and social history come to see the site of one of the most far-reaching utopian experiments in the world. Finally, descendants of the Oneida Community still think of the Mansion House as "home" and contribute in many ways to the preservation of the place that is their heritage.

It is the intent of OCMH to make the study and appreciation of Oneida Community history accessible to all people.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE AND BACKGROUND

Oneida Community Mansion House (OCMH) was chartered by the New York State Board of Regents in July 1987 and in January 1988 took over ownership and management of the 93,000 square foot Mansion House, and about 14 acres of grounds from Oneida Ltd. The grounds now comprise about 200 acres with the addition of East Park (18.4 acres) in 1993, the Vineyard (1.2 acres) in 1994, and the golf course, cemetery and Sunset Lake in 2003.

The Mansion House, a National Historic Landmark, was constructed in stages between 1861 and 1914. It was the home of the 19th-century utopian Oneida Community which was founded by John Humphrey Noyes and his followers when they moved to Central New York from Putney, Vermont. The utopian community became the joint-stock company, Oneida Community Ltd. in 1881, and the name of the company was changed to Oneida Ltd. in 1935. Residential, dining and guest functions which have always been part of the Mansion House continue and are operated by the OCMH.

IV. STATEMENT OF AUTHORITY

Overall responsibility for the management of the collection rests with the Executive Director and Curator of Collections and Interpretation of OCMH. This responsibility is delegated to appropriate staff and volunteers and is implemented by the policies and procedures set forth in this document and approved by the Board of Trustees. It is understood that the Executive Director and Curator will seek advice and assistance from the Historic Preservation Committee of the Board of Trustees as well as outside sources.

V. COLLECTING PLAN

The collections at OCMH are the foundation for the museum's programs and a vehicle through which the museum carries out its mission to educate the public. OCMH considers itself the primary or exclusive repository for items of the following nature, listed in order of collecting priority:

1. Objects relating directly to the Oneida Community and its branch communities (at Wallingford, Connecticut; Brooklyn, New York; Manlius, New York and Niagara Falls, Canada) and its predecessor, the Putney [Vermont] Community.
2. Objects relating to the Mansion House and other Community sites, including architectural documentation, plans, drawings, photographs, and building components.
3. Objects relating to the companies Oneida Community, Ltd. and Oneida Ltd. and to the history of the surrounding Sherrill and Kenwood area as it furthers the interpretation of the Oneida Community.
4. Objects relating to the life and work of Jessie Catherine Kinsley.
5. Objects from other 19th century utopian communities will be considered if they bear a relation to the Oneida Community.

The collections are expanded and enriched by selectively building on existing strengths, by filling gaps in collections, and, in special instances, by introducing and pursuing new areas of collecting. In deciding whether or not to accept collection materials the museum must consider such factors as whether it has the storage space and other resources necessary for acquisition, cataloguing, preservation, conservation, and accessibility.

The primary rationale for collecting is to develop a body of artifacts, visual representations and intellectual material that documents and helps to interpret the history and process of the development of the Oneida Community, Oneida Community Ltd. and Oneida Ltd.

OCMH seeks to improve the collections through purchase, gift, bequest and, under limited circumstances, exchange. Before it is accepted, an object must meet the criteria outlined above, have a definite purpose within the museum and be in a physical condition appropriate to its intended use.

Materials are acquired for the collection (accessioned) with the understanding that they will be kept for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, OCMH reserves the right to remove objects (deaccession) according to its policy. Except under extraordinary circumstances, OCMH will not acquire material with restrictions or without also receiving complete title.

OCMH is committed to maintaining complete and accurate records for every item to the collections, to the continual improvement and updating of those records and to improving accessibility through new information technologies.

VI. DEFINITION OF COLLECTIONS

A. Buildings and Grounds

1. The Mansion House
2. The Summer House (1866)
3. The Immediate Grounds (13.8 acres), including the North and South Lawns and Gardens
4. The Vineyard, the park immediately across from the house (1.19 acres)
5. East Park, along the Oneida Creek (18.4 acres)
6. Sunset Lake, Oneida Community Golf Course, and Oneida Community Cemetery

B. Artifact Collections

1. Furniture, clothing, decorative arts, paintings, works of art on paper, and utilitarian objects made in or brought to the Oneida Community (approx. 2,500 objects)
2. Books, pamphlets, sheet music, and ephemera that illustrate the intellectual, cultural, and business life of the Community (approx. 10,500 items)
3. The photographic archive documenting the life of the Mansion House during and since the days of the Oneida Community (approx. 11,000 items)
4. The unique braided textile work and paintings of Jessie Catherine Kinsley (about 25 items)

VII. COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY

A. Documentation

Documentation of collections and good record keeping are essential to the mission of the museum. The museum will maintain up-to-date and accurate records that document the status, history and activity of objects owned by or in the custody of OCMH.

These records constitute the intellectual collection of the museum and are to be safeguarded from hazards such as fire, water, loss, degradation and vandalism. All paper and file folders should be made of acid-free materials, and Accession Books should be duplicated with copies kept off the premises. Legal documents pertaining to the collections are to be kept in locked, fireproof file cabinets. Automated records are backed up regularly and copies secured offsite.

1. The museum maintains an Accession Log listing each item in the order of acquisition. Any item accessioned in the Artifact and Research Library collections is assigned a unique trinomial identification number which is applied in an appropriate and reversible manner.
2. Object files are maintained that contain:
 - catalogue description;
 - object history and provenance;
 - research;
 - photographs;
 - method and source of acquisition;
 - credit line;
 - location;
 - log of activity including loans, conservation, exhibition, etc.;
 - restrictions on use.

3. Source files are maintained that contain:
 - legal documents (Deed of Gift, Bill of Sale);
 - correspondence related to acquisition.

B. Acquisition of Objects

Acquisitions are made through gift, bequest, purchase or exchange and require the approval of the Executive Director and Curator. Purchases over \$10,000 will be recommended by the Executive Director, Curator, and Historic Preservation Committee for approval by the Board of Trustees.

Gifts to Oneida Community Mansion House are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law. It is the donor's responsibility to obtain an independent appraisal of donated property. Due to Internal Revenue Service regulations, the museum is prohibited from providing an appraisal to the donor.

Adding an object to the collection implies a sense of permanence and a commitment to holding the object in the public trust. An object is accessioned only if there is a good faith intention to retain it in the collection for the foreseeable future. An object may, on occasion, be deaccessioned, but it may not be accessioned into the collection for the sole purpose of selling it or exchanging it for another object in the future.

1. The following criteria are used to evaluate an object for the collection:
 - appropriateness to the mission and to the scope of the collection;
 - potential for exhibition and study;
 - condition of the object;
 - capability of OCMH to care for the object;
 - capability of OCMH to store the object;
 - any costs, direct or indirect, short term or long term, associated with the acquisition;
 - acceptability of the provenance;
 - ability to resolve any copyright, trademark, or other restrictions on the use or ownership of the objects.
2. Acquisitions of Objects of Gift or Bequest:
 - OCMH must take physical custody of the object.
 - A Deed of Gift should be executed by the donor or the donor's agent. Complete title must be transferred to the museum without restrictions. In extremely unusual circumstances the Board of Trustees, upon the recommendation of the Executive Director and Curator, may accept with restrictions.
 - The Executive Director or Curator will send a receipt and a letter of thanks to the donor.
 - When gifts or bequests of groups of items are offered and only a portion are intended to be accessioned, the Executive Director, Curator, and Historic Preservation Committee of the Board of Trustees will consider the planned disposition of objects not intended for the Accessioned Collection. Donors or estates should be informed of such planned disposition.

3. Acquisition of Objects by Purchase

- The OCMH must take physical custody of the object.
- The vendor's invoice will serve as title conveying all rights and should be kept in the same source file.

C. Disposal

Objects may be removed from the collections by deaccession and disposed of according to practices recommended by the American Association of Museums or the New York State Board of Regents. Any funds realized from the sale of a collection object shall be used only for the acquisition of additions to the collections, or for the preservation, conservation, or direct care of the collections.

To avoid the appearance of any conflict of interest, under no circumstances will a trustee, officer, staff member or volunteer knowingly acquire for personal use an object from the collections of Oneida Community Mansion House.

1. The following criteria are used to evaluate an object for deaccession and disposal. An object may be deaccessioned if one criterion among the following ten is met.

- The object has failed to retain its identity.
- The object is redundant.
- The object is inconsistent with the mission of the institution as set forth in its mission statement.
- The object is deaccessioned to accomplish refinement of collections.
- The object's preservation and conservation needs are beyond the capacity of the institution to provide.
- The OCMH is returning the object to the donor, or the donor's heirs or assigns, to fulfill donor restrictions relating to the object which the OCMH is no longer able to meet.
- The OCMH is repatriating the object or returning it to its rightful owner.
- It has been established that the object is inauthentic.
- The object presents a hazard to people or to other objects in the collections.
- The object has been lost or stolen and has not been recovered.

2. In order to deaccession an object the Executive Director and Curator shall:

- determine whether OCMH holds legal title;
- determine if there is a legal or moral restriction against disposal;
- provide a written recommendation with appropriate documentation to the Historical Preservation Committee which presents the proposed deaccession to the Board of Trustees for approval;
- notify the donor, if possible, in advance of disposal.

3. The methods of disposal, in order of preference, are the following.

- Exchange or donation to another public museum or educational institution.
- Selling at out-of-town public auction.
- Private sale through sealed bid.
- Documented destruction.

4. OCMH will maintain permanent and complete records including: reasons for deaccession, photographs, method of disposal, recipient, and sale price.

D. Access

OCMH supports and encourages scholarly research and will provide access to objects in the collection and to supporting records in every way consistent with their security and safety. Objects not on public exhibition may be studied by applying to the Curator. OCMH will not provide information about the value of an object, its location, or personal information about a donor or lender without permission.

E. Care & Maintenance

The responsibility for the physical care of the collections lies with the Executive Director (as delegated to Curator) who insures that conservation and maintenance schedules reflect public access requirements, research and exhibition needs, funding and staff resources. The Executive Director and Curator, in consultation with conservators, decide when treatment is required. The Executive Director and the Curator monitor and supervise all movement of objects within the museum and on and off the premises.

Constant attention is given to the improvement and efficient use of storage facilities, equipment, and materials, to keeping the collections clean and to maintaining a safe environment. Regular surveys taken by conservators result in long- and short-range plans for treatment of objects and improvement of storage.

F. Risk Management

Risks to the collections are constantly evaluated and assessed by staff. Risks are eliminated or reduced through proper use of objects, training, use of appropriate materials and equipment, proper storage and exhibit, and improvement of facilities. See Appendix 1 for more details on disaster response.

Collection objects are insured based on a 1995 appraisal and adjusted for inflation. Incoming loans are insured as agreed as par of the Loan Agreement. Objects left in the custody of the museum are not insured.

G. Security

The overall responsibility for security lies with the Executive Director and the Curator, but all staff must be constantly vigilant to the security of objects in storage, on exhibition, or in transit.

H. Inventory Controls

Location records are kept and physical inventories conducted to ensure that OCMH is accountable for its collections. A complete inventory should be conducted every five years. Spot inventories should be conducted annually by curatorial staff, or volunteers authorized and trained by curatorial staff.

I. Temporary Custody

Objects are accepted by OCMH for examination, attribution, identification, or consideration for acquisition. OCMH will give these objects the same professional care as similar objects in the collections, but will not insure the objects. Normally, objects will not remain in the custody of OCMH for more than 90 days. The owner will be issued a receipt describing the terms and limits of responsibility and a description of condition.

If unsolicited objects are sent to OCMH or left on the premises without donor identification, every effort will be made to locate the owner. If the owner cannot be located OCMH will seek legal advice about the disposition of the object.

If objects are found in the custody of OCMH for which there is no documentation and no identification of owner, every effort will be made to determine the owner. If the owner cannot be determined, OCMH will document the circumstances and seek legal advice about the disposition of the objects.

J. Lending and Borrowing

1. Outgoing Loans

OCMH may lend collection objects to museums and other suitable institutions for purposes such as a special exhibition, provided that the objects will be properly cared for during the life of the loan. Normally, objects will be lent only for non-profit educational and scholarly purposes, usually involving research or a public exhibition. The Executive Director and the Curator are responsible for reviewing loan requests.

A loan request must be submitted in writing, and an up-to-date facilities report must be on file with OCMH. The facilities report should describe the borrowing institution's facilities, staff, security, and environmental controls.

2. Incoming Loans

OCMH borrows objects to supplement its collections for exhibition or research purposes. Loans are for a limited period of time, usually one year, and are reviewed periodically. OCMH initiates loan requests and ensures that proper documentation is maintained.

VIII. MONITORING AND REVISING THE COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Executive Director and Curator are responsible for monitoring the Collections Management Policy and for recommending revisions to the Historic Preservation Committee of the Board of Trustees. The Historic Preservation Committee will review the policy at least every three years.

Amended and approved by the Board of Trustees on March 22, 2012.