

# THE DANISH IMMIGRANT MUSEUM

## Collections Policy

Revised 2005

### *Overview*

*A Museum's collections are the concrete expression of its mission and purpose. The mission drives all collections development activities.*

**Mission Statement:** The Danish Immigrant Museum shares the legacy and continuing influence of Danish culture as realized in the experiences and contributions of Danish immigrants, their descendents and Danes living in America.<sup>1</sup>

**Collections as embodiment of Museum's purpose:** The Museum will collect examples of material culture which illustrate the history of the Danish immigrant in terms of his or her life in Denmark before emigration, travels and means of reaching America, and life here including occupations, social organizations, schools, churches and homes. The Museum will also collect representative examples of the material culture of subsequent generations of Danish Americans, which reflect their achievements, continuing ties to Denmark and Danish traditions and their efforts to maintain communal expressions of their Danish heritage. Since Danish immigration continues, contemporary as well as historic artifacts will be appropriate to the collections.

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### *Collections scope*

*The Danish Immigrant Museum has two distinct collections: the permanent artifact collection and the UER (utility, education, research/reference) collection. Each collection, while reflecting the Museum's mission, is shaped by a different governing dynamic.<sup>2</sup>*

**Permanent Collection:** Artifacts, documents, written materials and memorabilia added to the permanent collection will be used for exhibition, study and documentary purposes. Items sought and accepted for exhibition should relate closely to the key ideas and events of the story of the Danish immigrant and subsequent generations of Danish Americans. The articles collected should contribute strongly to the understanding and appreciation of the stories of Danish immigration and the relationship of subsequent generations of Danish Americans to their ethnic heritage. The artifacts may clarify, vitalize, humanize, personalize or symbolize elements of the story. Whenever possible, the artifact should have an association with a specific person or institution; an artifact with such an

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<sup>1</sup> This is the mission statement officially approved by the Board of Directors at their June 2005 meeting.

<sup>2</sup> A third collection at the Museum is the Family History and Genealogy Center's (FHGC) collection, which is independently managed and has its own collection policy.

association is preferable to one without. Artifacts may also be collected for study purposes and may fulfill other needs of the Museum in addition to exhibition, such as research for staff, visiting specialists and the public. Additionally, artifacts may provide documentation for other parts of the collection and serve as a reserve for future exhibits.

**UER Collection:** UER is an acronym for the Utility, Education, Research /Reference Collection, which is a “hands on”, use collection. Items in this collection are sought for educational or institutional use. As such, they might be used as general reference material for the public, might serve to illustrate talks and demonstrations, or might provide visitors and program participants “hands on” knowledge, meaning that the objects will be touched as well as viewed. Such items might be used in exhibit situations where the environment and/or security might threaten the preservation of a permanent collection artifact. The UER items may be loaned to other institutions or responsible individuals. Sometimes an object, such as a table or chair will be accepted for public use within the museum.<sup>3</sup> Reproductions may also be sought or commissioned for the educational collection.

**Possible acquisition restrictions:** The Museum may be restricted in its acceptance of some artifacts for either the permanent or UER collections due to two factors. First, the physical space of the building presents immediate limitations. The Museum should be able to offer every artifact in its care proper environmental conditions, physical safety, and appropriate support.<sup>4</sup> If an artifact being offered is too large to safely reside in the available space within that appropriate environment, it should not be accepted. Second, the Museum should have the resources to provide each artifact with the conservation, care, and supplies it needs. This includes proper training (as detailed under the section of this policy entitled “Collections Care”) and adequate archival supplies and supports.

**Documentary support for the collections:** The strength of a Museum’s collection is intimately bound to its documentation. Because of this, every effort will be extended to supplement the collection with the appropriate documentary materials and artifacts.<sup>5</sup> Documentation which supports and expands upon the Wall of Honor histories will also be welcomed. The Wall of Honor histories are a resource unique to The Danish

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<sup>3</sup> Objects receiving this designation are ones which would qualify for acceptance into the Museum’s permanent artifact collection but are specified “for use only” by the donor. The UER designation ensures the objects of a certain degree of custodial care during their life of use at the Museum. Excluded from this category are objects specifically purchased for use, objects acquired by the Museum as part of its development activities or relatively contemporary objects gifted to the Museum to use as it deems fit.

<sup>4</sup> In collections, support refers to physically helping the artifact support its own weight in order to reduce the stress it suffers. In cases such as clothing, acid-free tissue is carefully stuffed into sleeves and into the areas where there are folding creases so as to keep textile fibers from breaking. Appropriate mounts of fabric and archival foam can be made to support objects such as a rifle so that its parts are not subjected to excessive stress by resting on one side or section.

<sup>5</sup> This will include the establishment of a good curatorial reference library with texts referencing various aspects of the collection.

Immigrant Museum and their development and expansion is to be encouraged. The Museum, however, will not seek to build an independent archive or library and any archival material that is unrelated to the Museum's collections will be directed to other appropriate repositories.

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## ***Acquisition***

*The Danish Immigrant Museum will build its collections through gifts, purchases and exchanges. The primary emphasis, however, will be on building the collections through gifts.*

**Gift terms:** All donations to the Museum will be outright and unconditional gifts. Donations may be tax deductible; however, the Museum assumes no responsibility for providing an evaluation or appraisal of the gift. An accession statement (deed of gift) outlining all details on the material acquired shall be signed by the donor and the Museum director.<sup>6</sup> Where possible, donors will be informed at the time of the gift as to the probable use of their gift; that is, whether it will be taken into the permanent collection, UER collection, Family History and Genealogy collection, or for sale to benefit the Museum. The appropriation of the gift within the Museum's collections will be clarified for all donors at the time of the accessioning paperwork.

Objects may be accepted as gifts by the Museum for the specific purpose of sale or trade. The Museum will consider for sale or trade only those objects that are not appropriate for the existing collections. Objects accepted as gifts for sale will remain outside of all accessioning procedures. Proceeds from sales may be used to purchase additions to the Museum's existing collections or for their conservation and care, or to benefit the Museum's operations and programs.

In completing the Artifact Receipt/ Temporary Custody form,<sup>7</sup> the donor will understand that the gift is in temporary custody of the Museum; if his or her gift lot is accepted, it will become a part of either the permanent or UER collection; and if it is not accepted, it will be handled according to the instructions given on the Receipt. A thank you letter will specify which collection designation the gift has received. That letter will accompany the deed of gift, which will be signed by the donor and the Museum director.

**Documentation emphasis:** The documentary value of a museum collection is a principal criterion of excellence. Accession records shall be of the highest order of accuracy and completeness. To this end, artifacts in the collections shall have a provenance as completely documented as possible. This provenance shall be a matter of public record.

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<sup>6</sup> On the back of every deed are "Conditions Governing Gifts to the Danish Immigrant Museum," a listing which details the legal and professional terms for each gift.

<sup>7</sup> This is a combined form which serves two purposes; it officially receipts the artifact, while also delineating its temporary custody status.

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## ***Loans***

*The conditions of loan for any artifact shall be intended to protect the artifact and provide for its safe return. Such conditions shall include, but not be restricted to, the following information and terms: complete information concerning the person, corporation or department requesting the loan, the method of transportation, security precautions, place of display, occasion of display, responsibility for expenses of transportation to and from the Museum, specific beginning and end of the loan period, and complete description of the artifact(s) loaned including catalog number.*

**Outgoing loans:** Loans from the permanent collection may be made to recognized museums, galleries, historical societies and bona fide organizations and corporations whose physical premises can be satisfactorily evaluated in a facilities report. It shall be the general policy not to loan artifacts from the Museum's permanent collection other than to organizations of the preceding nature. Outgoing loans require the approval of the curatorial staff and the Museum's Executive Director.

It shall be the general policy that loans to educational institutions and related organizations will be made from The Danish Immigrant Museum's educational collection. Loans from the educational collection may be made to regional historical societies, museums and galleries and to schools and responsible individuals with the approval of the curatorial staff and the Museum's Executive Director.

*All loans are subject to the conditions listed below:*<sup>8</sup>

-) The artifacts loaned must be identified as being loaned through the courtesy of The Danish Immigrant Museum.

-) The terms and approval of each loan must be based upon the condition and long term well-being of the requested artifact(s).

-) It is recommended that loan periods not exceed one year. Loans extending beyond this must be very specifically negotiated. Extension of any loan period must be duly authorized and approved. Loaned artifacts may be subject to recall by The Danish Immigrant Museum. They are to remain in the custody of the original borrowing institution and are not to be loaned to any other person, organization or agencies.

-) Provision shall be made and agreed to by both parties that an officer or employee of the Museum may retrieve an unreturned artifact at the expense of the agency delaying the return.

**Incoming loans:** Loans shall not be accepted from individuals, corporations or other groups unless the artifact is of special and unique value to a particular exhibit or study.

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<sup>8</sup> On the back of each loan form is a longer and more detailed version of the following list. Incoming and outgoing loans have conditions specific to each type of loan situation.

This policy shall prevail because of the expense involved in housing, handling, maintaining and insuring loaned artifacts. Should any artifact be accepted for loan, the lender shall sign a temporary loan agreement specifying the period of the loan, insured value, and other pertinent information relative to the use and care of the artifact. The Museum may insure loaned artifacts, but shall assume no liability in excess of the insured agreement. No loan period shall exceed one year unless specifically negotiated by both parties.

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## ***Deaccessioning***

*The Danish Immigrant Museum's permanent and educational collections are intended never to be static, and our purpose is to continually upgrade and improve them. One of the most important ways to carry out such an important plan is by continual culling to remove duplicate, unrelated or damaged artifacts and allow space, funds and staff time for superior ones. Artifacts may be removed from the collection by the process of deaccessioning.*

No artifact may be removed from the permanent collection unless it is represented in the collection by a demonstrably superior artifact, or has been determined not to be genuine or in keeping with the scope and integrity of the Museum, or if it is in a state of deterioration that cannot be reversed or corrected by appropriate conservation procedures. No artifact may be deaccessioned from the UER collection unless it can no longer fulfill an educational or utility function for the Museum. No artifact shall be deaccessioned without fee simple title,<sup>9</sup> and no artifact may be deaccessioned that would discredit or adversely affect the reputation of the Museum. When these conditions have been met, the curatorial department may recommend an artifact for deaccessioning to the Museum's Collections Committee<sup>10</sup>. Following the Committee's recommendation for deaccessioning, the proposal will be presented to the Board of Directors for action.<sup>11</sup> Only upon affirmative action by two thirds majority of the Board of Directors may deaccessioning be enacted.

After deaccessioning of collection artifacts, the curatorial/collections staff, in consultation with the Museum's Executive Director, will determine the most appropriate method of disposal. The first consideration will be a transfer to the Museum's own Family History and Genealogy Center or to its own educational collection. The second consideration will be the transfer of artifacts to another museum, library or educational institution. Sale of the artifacts will be a third alternative. There will be no sales to staff,

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<sup>9</sup> This essentially means an artifact given without restrictions imposed at the time of its intake into the collection.

<sup>10</sup> The Museum's Executive Director is a member of this committee.

<sup>11</sup> An exception to this is if the condition of the piece may endanger other pieces in the collection. For example, if a hat is found to be infested with moths, it may be deaccessioned and disposed of prior to Board approval. The Board will be made aware of the conditions of that deaccession at the next scheduled meeting.

volunteers, Board of Director members or their families. The proceeds from all sales may be used to purchase additions to the permanent collection, conserve artifacts already in the collection or to benefit Museum operations and programs. Objects deaccessioned because of deterioration or inherent vice fall into yet another category and will be appropriately disposed of. The curatorial department will report the disposition of deaccessioned artifacts to the Board of Directors at the next scheduled meeting.

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## ***Collections Care***

**Training:** All individuals (staff, as well as volunteers) working with the artifact collection will receive training in the proper handling of artifacts.

**Conservation and Care:** Artifacts will be stored in a climate-controlled environment and will also be physically supported<sup>12</sup> and protected using archival supplies and sound professional methods. The advice of trained conservationists will be sought and implemented as funds allow.

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## ***Records***

*The procedural use of all record forms is detailed in a separate procedural manual. This manual will at all times serve as a supplementary document to the Museum's Collection Policy Statement. The primary records maintained by the collections department are listed in outline form below.*

**Intake records:** All intake activity is recorded on sequentially numbered artifact receipt/temporary custody forms, which are maintained in an artifact intake notebook.

**Accessioning records:** All accessioning records are entered in the manual ledger and in the PastPerfect database. Printouts are maintained in the artifact files and in the catalog notebooks kept in the collections area.

**Loan records:** Loan records encompass both incoming and outgoing loans; each loan activity is recorded in the PastPerfect database (loan catalog section) and in the manual ledger records.

**Custody records:** All items left temporarily in the Museum's care are recorded and negotiated through means of a combined artifact receipt/temporary custody form.

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<sup>12</sup> Please reference footnote #4 on page 3.

**Deaccessioning records:** The reviews and all formal paperwork associated with deaccessioning activity are maintained in the PastPerfect database, on Excel spread sheets and in appropriate files.

**Action summary:** A manual ledger record is maintained in which all accessions and loans are recorded in one-line summaries. Records of all actions are maintained in the PastPerfect database, and all of the formal paperwork that accompanies those actions is stored in the appropriate files.

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## ***Insurance***

*The Museum carries an umbrella policy through the Harry A. Koch Company of Omaha, Nebraska. That policy covers all artifacts in both the permanent and UER collections, all artifacts temporarily housed within the building, and those in transit to and from the Museum for such situations as exhibits.*

**Loans:** The Museum's umbrella policy covers all artifacts temporarily housed in the building, as well as their travel to and from the Museum up to \$1000. Each piece is covered equally. The lender may choose to carry his or her own insurance in addition to or in place of the Museum's coverage, but that coverage is the responsibility of the lender.

**In-house collections:** The Museum's umbrella policy covers all artifacts in both the permanent and UER collection. Each piece is covered equally.

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## ***Inventories***

Ideally, extensive and thorough inventories of the collections will be initiated every 8 to 10 years or made during any major resettlement of the collections, such as the resettlement of artifacts into the Museum's new visual storage area (1998-2000). Otherwise, spot inventories of the collections will be the rule.

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## ***Collections access***

**Public access:** Increased public access to the Museum's collections is an important long term goal. At present, such access is provided primarily through visual storage and the Museum's exhibitions. Over time, the goal is to provide the public with computer access to the Museum's collections through PastPerfect. This is dependent upon a comprehensive cataloging of the entire collection into the PastPerfect format, where

artifacts are digitally referenced and presented with their documentation and relevant family history.<sup>13</sup>

**Concrete Physical Access:** For security reasons and for the safety of the artifacts, physical access to the collection storage areas is strictly limited to trained staff and volunteers, unless special arrangements are made with the curatorial staff. When untrained persons are allowed into storage areas, they will be closely supervised by trained staff. Those persons will not be allowed to handle artifacts unless authorized by the curatorial staff. If they receive that approval, proper care and handling standards will apply. The public and/or other untrained persons also may not handle artifacts elsewhere in the building unless they are authorized to do so and adhere to the standards established above.

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<sup>13</sup> The first several years of the Museum's collection were manually cataloged. This data needs to be transferred into PastPerfect, the files revisited and all appropriate supporting documentation entered into the appropriate PastPerfect cataloging categories and each of the objects digitally reproduced and entered into the PastPerfect image database, where it will be linked with its textual information. From 1994-1999, objects were cataloged into a Microsoft Access database. When the Museum acquired PastPerfect, this data was integrated into PastPerfect but owing to different informational fields and incomplete cataloging data, all of these entries will need to be revisited in the same manner as described above for the manual cataloging. The images of these objects will also need to be digitally reproduced and integrated into the database.

# Collection Development Guidelines for the Family History & Genealogy Center of The Danish Immigrant Museum

Draft of 4 October 2002, revised 15 January 2003

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**The mission** of the Family History and Genealogy Center of The Danish Immigrant Museum is to encourage the study of the Danish-American experience by identifying, collecting, and preserving information on Danish immigrants, particularly those who came to the U.S., their ancestral lines and descendants, and the institutions and organizations with which they affiliated; making this information readily accessible to interested parties; and providing instruction and information on genealogical techniques and resources to persons interested in researching their [Danish] ancestry.

**Formats** to be collected include: books and printed compilations, microforms, CD-roms, videos, digital compilations or collections, newspaper clippings (photocopied), magazines & newsletters, and a limited amount of ephemera.

**Linkage and collaboration** with the Museum's object collection is implicit and with other institutions collecting information on Danish-Americans is expected and encouraged.

**Types of materials to be collected** (with the exception of general reference materials and compilations, emphasis or content is assumed to be substantially Danish-American):

- Up-to-date general genealogical reference materials (US and DK)
- Family histories & genealogical compilations
- Source materials that place or assist in placing individuals or families in time and place, both before and after emi/immigration, such as:
  - Telephone directories
  - City/county directories
  - County, town or regional histories
  - Maps, gazetteers and platbooks
  - Cemetery compilations
  - Vital record compilations
  - Military service or pension records or indexes
  - Passenger list & naturalization records or indexes
  - Federal, state, and local censuses and tax lists
  - Church directories
  - Church histories
  - Organizational directories and indexes (e.g. Danish Brotherhood records)
  - Newspaper abstracts
  - Genealogical and historical periodicals and indexes to same
  - Biographies, biographical sketches, and biographical compilations of immigrants
  - Published memoirs and compilations of immigrant letters

- Photographs and personal documents (originals are to be placed in the curatorial collection, with photocopies or scanned copies available in FHGC)
- Yearbooks or directories of Danish-American educational institutions
- Obituary collections
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- Materials in English or Danish that provide information on or illustrate Danish history, places, historical personages, and institutions. Except for standard or significant reference works (e.g. *Kraks Danmark*), if in Danish these should be substantially pictorial in nature.
- Works on the Danish immigrant experience or immigration in general.
- Wall of Honor data files (2nd copy)
- Due to the heavy concentration of Danish immigrants in the 4-county area (Audubon, Cass, Pottawattamie & Shelby Cos. IA), additional materials pertaining to these counties, including:
  - High school yearbooks
  - Local history files
- Limited materials that are not strictly genealogical in nature, but which illustrate the Danish immigrant experience or activities of Danish-Americans, [and the broader historical, sociological and intellectual climate in the U.S.] such as:
  - Newspapers such as *Bien*, *The danske Pioneer*
  - Historical and present-day newsletters and periodicals published by Danish-American organizations & institutions
  - Artifacts that are not included as part of the Museum's object collection.

**Multiple copies** of some materials will be collected, depending upon rarity, relevance, and usage.

**Materials that will not be collected** by FHGC include the following:

- Danish-language books with only literary significance
- Fiction, drama, and poetry by Danish-American writers (unless reflecting the immigrant experience)
- Non-fiction of a non-biographical nature by Danish-American writers
- Danish children's books
- Church, business, and institutional record books
- Hymnals and song-books
- Information on contemporary Denmark other than general overviews
- Materials on non-Scandinavian immigrant communities in US
- General historical periodicals
- [Entire collections of books that overall do not fit the above guidelines]

Materials for the collection will be primarily solicited through donations, but will also be acquired by purchase, exchange, or other means [within the overall acquisition guidelines of The Danish Immigrant Museum].

Areas remaining to be decided: 1) Articles in miscellaneous magazines or journals that deal with Danish immigrants/immigration: keep entire issue or just cover and article? Or, make copy of relevant material and cover and give original to Curator? 2) Danish WWII activities (other than the rescue of Danish Jews) 3) other