

## Explaining Accessioning and Deaccessioning of artifacts of the Historical Collection by Historical Commissions

### TO BE A PART OF A COLLECTION, AN OBJECT MUST BE FORMALLY ACCESSIONED

ACCESSIONING IS “A FORMAL PROCESS INVOLVED IN ACCEPTING AND RECORDING AN ITEM AS AN OBJECT IN A MUSEUM’S COLLECTION AND ITS INVENTORY”. *From the International Council of Museums website -- [icom.museum](http://icom.museum)*

DEACCESSIONING IS THE ACT OF LAWFULLY REMOVING AN OBJECT FROM A MUSEUM’S COLLECTIONS. OBJECTS MAY BE DEACCESSIONED FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS:

### Criteria for deaccessioning objects, including recordings, photos and text from museum collections:

1. Object is attributed incorrectly or is **not authentic**;
2. Object is **inferior to another** of the same item or category in the collection;
3. Object is a **duplicate** or a near duplicate of another object, or other objects, in the collection;
4. Object is in **poor condition**, damaged beyond reasonable repair, and not appropriate for exhibiting or useful for study or teaching or research purposes;
5. Object has been requested through legal means for **restitution** or claimed as stolen property, forgery or fraudulent;
6. The object is **infrequently or never exhibited** (this does not apply to textiles, paper, etc., due to sensitivity to climate and light exposure);
7. Object is a **threat** to the health and safety of the staff and public;
8. The object **cannot be taken care of** properly because of conservation and storage requirements that another ownership could supply;
9. The object is inappropriately placed because it **does not contribute to the mission and collection goals** as defined by the Historical Commission with input from the Historical Society.

## WHAT COMES AFTER DEACCESSIONING OBJECTS?

**Museum or organization must dispose of deaccessioned objects:**

1. Object is offered to another museum, cultural or educational institution, exchanged, sold, auctioned, returned to private donor, or destroyed.
2. Some ways to sell antiques and collectables include the following:
  - a. Consignment shop
  - b. Directly to dealer
  - c. Newspaper listing
  - d. Craigslist
  - e. Flea market
  - f. Garage sale
  - g. Estate sale
  - h. Heirloomsathome.com
  - i. Auction
  - j. Ebay – selling antiques
  - k. Etsy – selling handmade, vintage and antique items
  - l. Ruby Lane – popular marketplace dedicated to antiques
  - m. Google Search
  - n. TIAS
  - o. Go Antiques
  - p. Bonanza
  - q. Online Dealers – you might only get wholesale prices
  - r. Social media – Facebook Instagram, Twitter
  - s. Local yard sale
  - t. Local auction.

## **Where do funds acquired from deaccessioned objects go?**

“Funds made available from deaccessioning and disposal should be used solely for benefit of museum collection and the acquisition and care in same collection. By no means for the cost of administration or maintenance.

Museum personnel and family members or close associates should not be permitted to purchase an object deaccessioned from a collection for which they are responsible. Deaccessioned objects should be carefully documented:”

Care should be taken to be transparent with objects and to carefully document deaccessioning.

***Icom.museum*** (*International Council of Museums*)

“At Takoma Art Museum ... proceeds from art sales are never used as operating funds, to build general endowment, or any other expenses. Funds from deaccessioning are either used immediately to purchase other works or are invested in an acquisition endowment earmarked to support the long-term growth of a museum’s collection.”

“... the process is public and transparent ... no action would be taken if it compromised the integrity and good standing of the institution and its community at large within the profession.”

***takomaartmuseum.org***

## **QUESTIONS THAT THE ABOVE RAISES FOR US TO DISCUSS:**

### **Question 1: How do we arrive at final accessioning/deaccessioning decisions?**

Takoma Art Museum makes final decisions regarding accessioning/deaccessioning an object in the following way:

***“Working with the Museum Curators and outside specialists, the Director recommends objects for deaccessioning to the Collection Committee. The Collection Committee advises the Board of Trustees who have final approval on deaccessioning as well as accessioning.” takomaartmuseumorg.***

How might this approach be adapted for our organizations?

1. Perhaps the Custodian Committee of the Historical Society makes the recommendation [which is done by the Director in Takoma, above], since the Custodian Committee is made up of members of both the Society and the Council and deals directly with maintaining the objects in the collection.
2. Next, the Custodian Committee would advise the Historical Commission, who would have final responsibility for approving or rejecting plans for accessioning or deaccessioning [which is given to the Board of Trustees in Takoma, above], since the Commission is “responsible for community-wide historic preservation planning”.
3. Is it appropriate to say the Society generally deals with the details relating to the collection and the Commission deals with the big picture relating to the collection?

**Question 2: How do we feel about a) Berlin artifacts that tell Berlin stories, compared to b) artifacts that Berlin people would typically have used even if the provenance of the artifact is unknown, compared to c) a collection from various sources that belonged to Berlin person?**

**Question 3: What do we see as some aspects of our mission? (Aspects might fall under topics such as preservation, restoration, education, research, entertainment, etc.).**

**Question 4: How do we see the balance among the various aspects of our mission? In general? At this point in time?**

**Question 5: What is our current Inventory (beginning with estimates)?**

**Question 6: What is our current storage situation?**

**Question 7: What is our current display/exhibit space?**

**Question 8: How do our mission choices inform the exhibit design and furnishing of the Bullard House restoration?**