

## Collections Management Policy



## **Introduction**

### **Statement of Purpose:**

The Collections Management Policy articulates the guidelines that shape the collections management activities of the Adirondack Experience (ADKX). This policy guides the Board of Trustees, staff and volunteers in carrying out their respective responsibilities toward collections care, security and access consistent with the museum's mission. It includes the legal and ethical obligations of the museum to the material culture it holds in trust for the present and future citizens of New York State. This policy is subject to review on a regular basis.

### **Mission:**

The Adirondack Experience (formerly the Adirondack Museum) was established by the Adirondack Historical Association, which was chartered by the New York State Education Department in 1955. The purposes for which the Association formed were set forth in its charter. They are:

To promote and encourage historical study and research relating to the area within the State of New York known as the Adirondacks, including the Adirondack Park, in order to increase knowledge and understanding of the Adirondacks.

To gather and disseminate information about the interactions over time of people, land and ecosystems in the Adirondacks.

To collect and preserve books, manuscripts, papers, and historic objects relating to the Adirondacks.

To maintain a historical museum and other property necessary or desirable to carry on the work of the Association.

In 2023, the Adirondack Experience Board of Trustees approved the following mission statement:

*ADKX preserves and interprets the diverse stories of Adirondack history, culture, and people to spark thoughtful dialogue and help shape the Adirondacks of the future.*

### **History:**

Since 1957, the Adirondack Experience has shared the history of the people who have lived, worked and played in the Adirondack Park. Indeed, the history of the very place on which the museum sits mirrors the history of the Adirondacks: from lumber camp to summer hotel to museum, it embodies the transformation of the Adirondacks from mineral and lumber resource to resort to recreation getaway.

William Wessels, “as the owner of an old-time Adirondack hotel and a wide traveler over the mountains,” had developed an interest in the history of the Adirondack Park. At his invitation, 18 men and women with a similar interest met at a luncheon July 3, 1948, at Blue Mountain House and founded the Adirondack Historical Association.

Granted a charter by the New York State Legislature the following year, the group made plans to build a museum in Blue Mountain Lake. In 1954, the Adirondack Historical Association purchased the Blue Mountain House property from William Wessels, and began construction on a new museum building.

The Adirondack Experience opened to the public on August 4, 1957, after two years of construction and collecting. Director Robert Bruce Inverarity described the new museum’s mission as “ecological in nature, showing the history of man’s relation to the Adirondacks.” The exhibits, interspersed with the old hotel buildings, featured the Marion River Carry Railroad engine and passenger car, the steamboat Osprey, a stagecoach, several horse-drawn vehicles, a birch bark canoe and dioramas depicting various aspects of life and work in the Adirondacks.

The Adirondack Experience today is renowned for the breadth of its collections that include historic artifacts, photographs, archival materials, books, and fine art documenting the Adirondack region's past. Twenty-three exhibit spaces and galleries tell the stories of the men and women who have lived, worked and played in the largest wilderness area east of the Mississippi River.

The museum includes exhibitions, a research library, publications, and an active education department that offers special events, classes, symposia, workshops, demonstrations, field trips, and engaging hands-on experiences for thousands of visitors each year.

## **Authority and responsibilities**

### **Board of Trustees:**

The Adirondack Experience is governed by a Board of Trustees consisting of officers and members numbering not more than 30 and not less than 5. Trustees are elected to serve by a majority vote among seated Board members.

The Board of Trustees manages and controls the business and affairs of the Adirondack Experience, including all matters pertaining to the museum’s collections.

The Executive Director is the Adirondack Experience’s chief executive officer. S/he is responsible for implementing the Board of Trustee’s policies and directs and manages the museum’s activities, including the “proper care, protection and exhibition of the Museum’s collections,” per the institution’s by-laws.

### **Collections Committee:**

The Collections Committee consists of at least one Board Trustee (who serves as Committee Chair); the Executive Director; the Chief Curator; the Librarian; and a number of outside experts and collections advocates.

The Collections Committee is charged with “advising staff in formulating and implementing policies regarding the acquisition, deaccessioning, lending, conservation, storage, security, and use of collections” as well as “provide input to the Treasurer and Finance Committee concerning budget items that affect the acquisition, conservation, maintenance and use of the collection, including personnel costs and special projects.”

### **Staff:**

The Collections Department (Chief Curator, Curators, Registrar, Collections Manager and Conservator) has responsibility for the direct care and maintenance of the permanent collection, including intellectual control, preservation, storage and access. The Chief Curator formulates policy regarding collections management, which s/he takes to the Collections Committee and/or the Board of Trustees for approval. The staff, under direction of the Chief Curator, are responsible for maintaining cleanliness and order in collection storage; establishing environmental control standards in exhibition and collection storage areas; monitoring exhibition and storage environments; identifying and recommending needed conservation; creating and maintaining accession records; providing public access to collections for research and programming purposes; providing security guidelines for exhibition and collections areas; rights and reproductions; and all aspects of loans to and from outside institutions and from individuals. Collections development, with the exceptions outlined in the Adirondack Experience Collection Development Policy, is conducted by the staff collections committee under the supervision of the Chief Curator.

Staff of the Buildings and Grounds Department, in consultation with the Chief Curator and the Conservator and Collections Manager, are responsible for maintaining proper environmental conditions as specified by the Collections Department in exhibition and collections storage areas and addressing maintenance and preservation needs of historic structures in the museum collection. Buildings and Grounds staff are also responsible for communicating in a timely fashion with curatorial staff about any preservation or environmental problems or concerns as they occur.

## **Collections**

### **Scope of Collection:**

Since 1955, the Adirondack Experience has been collecting the material culture of the Adirondack region. The collections include books, newspapers, objects, archaeological artifacts, manuscripts, art, photographs, ephemera and other materials that illuminate the Adirondack story. These things are the touchstones to our past—how we have lived, worked, played and been inspired in this unique part of the world. The collections are priceless and irreplaceable. As a steward of the region’s material and creative heritage, the Adirondack Experience has a fiduciary and ethical responsibility for safeguarding the collections and making them available for use by the public.

### **Definition of Collections**

Objects collected by the Adirondack Experience fall into one of three collections: the curatorial collection; the library collection; or the for-use collection.

The curatorial collections, managed by the Collections Department, include art, photographs, three dimensional objects, and video and motion picture film.

Library collections include books, bound volumes, manuscripts and documents, posters and broadsides, maps, oral history tapes, and printed ephemera. The Library collections are subject to a separate management policy, and are therefore not addressed in this document.

The for-use collections include original and reproduction objects used for hands-on and education purposes or as props in exhibitions. These objects are not part of the permanent collection and are, to some extent, considered expendable.

### **Curatorial Collections**

#### *Acquiring objects:*

Acquisition of objects for the permanent collection is mission-driven. Objects are acquired for the museum collections through purchase, bequest and gift. Individual curators make an initial assessment of a gift or purchase. The proposed acquisition is brought to the Staff Collections Committee (comprised of the Chief Curator, Curator, Associate and Assistant Curators, Collections Manager and Registrar). The Committee discusses and evaluates the merits of each potential addition, and recommends accessioning or refusing accordingly. The final decision to accession rests with the Chief Curator.

Acquisition of certain items requires the approval of the Executive Director and/or Board of Trustees. The Chief Curator refers the decision to the Executive Director and the Board if the cost of the acquisition is in excess of \$5,000; if the item requires more care than current resources permit; is an historic building; or is larger or heavier than current storage facilities can accommodate.

The Adirondack Experience creates and maintains a permanent record of all objects acquired, including how the object was acquired, the object's provenance, all subsequent transactions, and exhibition and loan history. Data is entered into an automated database (PastPerfect) and paper copies of all records are kept in the accession files. Duplicate file key records are stored off site. Automated records are backed up daily, after closing, using two Synology (NAS Servers) Disk Stations each with 4 bays (1 TB hard drives).

All acquisitions become the sole and absolute property of the Adirondack Experience. A legal agreement between the Adirondack Experience and the donor is executed and becomes part of the permanent record. With few exceptions, the museum does not accept gifts with restrictions or conditions. In instances where the museum has acquired a work made by a living artist who wishes to retain an interest, such information is recorded on the deed of gift and in all subsequent catalogue records. Objects with any special requirements or conditions on use are tagged as "Restricted" in the catalogue record and in the accession file to alert staff and researchers. All donors are to be offered a copy of the museum's mission statement and the Collections Management Policy per New York State Board of Regents' Rules.

#### *Appraisals for donors to the museum and other outside parties*

Staff members may **not** conduct appraisals nor does the Adirondack Experience pay for private appraisals for donors or other outside parties. Staff may refer donors and other members of the public to qualified appraisers, but may make no recommendations nor offer any endorsements. Staff members do not advise the public on tax laws.

#### *Deaccessioning objects:*

Deaccessioning, the act of removing an object from the permanent curatorial collection, is done with extreme care and sensitivity. Items may be deaccessioned if they are an unnecessary duplicate, are no longer relevant to the museum's mission or collecting scope, or for specific other reasons listed on the Recommendation to Deaccession Form.

The deaccession of any object from the museum collection requires recommendation of a Curator, and approval of the Chief Curator, Staff Collections Committee, and the Executive Director. Objects of a value in excess of \$5,000, and/or extraordinary historic significance require the additional approval of the Board of Trustees working through the Collections Committee, the Boat Committee or the Art Committee, as appropriate.

Prior to any recommendation to deaccession, a Curator, Collections Manager or Registrar will review the records to identify any restrictions placed on the object as gift or purchase

to determine whether the museum is subject to any legal or ethical restrictions on disposal of the object(s).

The recommending Curator will complete a Recommendation to Deaccession form and present it to the Staff Collections Committee. The form shall clearly state the justification for the recommendation. The object(s) proposed for deaccessioning should meet one or more of the criteria listed on the form. In addition to noting the reason or reasons the object(s) is recommended for deaccessioning, the following must also be recorded: whether the object(s) was acquired as gift or purchase; if a gift, what efforts have been made to contact the donor or the donor's heirs, if appropriate; and any pertinent facts about the provenance or reasons the object(s) was acquired.

Upon final approval by the Executive Director or Board of Trustees, the signed form will be returned to the Curator, who will make arrangements for the disposition of the object(s). The Registrar will be responsible for keeping all pertinent records related to the disposition, condition, and reasons for deaccessioning.

Preference will be given to retaining in the state or region material that is part of the historical, cultural or scientific heritage of the Adirondacks and/or New York State.

With rare exceptions, first consideration will be given to placing the object(s) through gift, exchange or sale in another collecting, non-profit, educational institution open to the public on a regular basis and employing a professional staff that is able to provide for maintaining the physical integrity of the object(s).

Objects will not be given or sold privately to Adirondack Experience employees, officers, members of the Board of Trustees, or their representatives.

The proceeds from the sales of deaccessioned objects shall be allocated to acquisition for the collection or for the direct care of objects in the permanent collection.

The Collections Department is responsible for submitting a year-end report of all deaccessions to the New York State Education Department. This report includes a description of the object(s), the justification for deaccessioning, and method of disposal.

## **Access and use of collections**

The Adirondack Experience is committed to providing public access to the collections to further its mission to engage audiences through research, exhibition, and education. This access is both physical and intellectual. The library and curatorial collections are available for research year-round by appointment. Appointments may be made by phone, email, or in writing. Collections may be used for publications, exhibitions, education, research, as reproductions, or in derivative works.

Access may be limited in rare instances if staff believe that the request would risk significant damage to collection materials; by the physical condition of the object (if it is

fragile or poses a health risk); if staff are not available to adequately supervise public use; and if there are any restrictions imposed by donors.

All researchers are to be made welcome and treated in a professional and courteous manner. All conditions of access must be applied equally and fairly.

All researchers (staff and public) must complete a research request form at the beginning of their appointment. At the end of the appointment, supervising staff records the materials examined by the researcher on the form. The information collected is used to track use and publication of the collection, discourage theft and enhance recovery, and document the source of damage, vandalism, or theft.

Staff are to treat the following information as confidential: donor contact information, and, at donor request, donor name; lender or potential lender addresses and phone numbers; security arrangements for the museum or private collections; condition, quality, and status of materials brought to the museum for assessment; researcher registration data; and insurance valuation of borrowed or collection items.

Information about an object's history (its provenance) is a vital portion of its value. This information includes its creator, collector, owner/user, and cultural or historical context. Staff are committed to recording, preserving, and making accessible all provenance information. Staff record and add to collection records any expert information received from donors, scholars, colleagues, or associated groups.

### Photograph Collection

Museum staff teach researchers about special handling requirements and provide them with gloves and pencils for note-taking.

Most photographs may be photocopied or scanned, as condition permits. Museum staff make all copies and scans of collection materials. Bound albums may not be copied unless condition permits. Oversized photographs that do not fit on a flatbed scanner or photocopy machine may not be copied.

### For-use Collection

The For-use Collection is comprised of objects acquired for hands-on educational programming or as "set dressing" (props) in exhibitions. These objects are not considered part of the permanent collection, and are acquired with the expectation that they will incur damage and wear and may need to be disposed of and replaced periodically. These are objects that have little or no provenance, and may be acquired through gift, bequest or purchase, or through deaccessioning artifacts from the permanent collection. Objects are donated to this collection with the full knowledge and permission of the donor. Prop objects (used as set dressing) are recorded in the museum's database and given unique



object identification numbers that begin with “PROP”. These objects are not subject to the levels of care required for the permanent collection.

Objects used for educational programming are administered and cared for by the Interpretation Department staff.

Collecting for the Permanent Collection takes precedence over the For-use Collection. Objects with strong provenance or interpretive value must be vetted by the Collections Department staff for possible accessioning before they may be added to the For-use Collection.

### *Exhibits*

Exhibits are the primary vehicle through which the Adirondack Experience reaches its audiences. Objects are selected for exhibition based on their relevance to the subject matter, physical condition and appearance. Preference is given to exhibiting objects from the museum’s own collections. Objects are the museum’s touchstones for the stories it tells.

Objects exhibited at the Adirondack Experience are represented accurately; reproductions are clearly identified as such. Donor name is included in all object labels unless the donor has specifically requested anonymity. All objects that are designated as “in honor of” or “in memory of” are so indicated in credit lines on exhibition labels each time the object(s) is exhibited.

Objects are exhibited with care paid to the environment in which they are placed: light levels, relative humidity and temperature, security and length of exposure are factors considered before an object is placed on exhibit. Exhibit spaces are continuously monitored for fluctuations in temperature and humidity levels. Light levels are established based on the sensitivity of the artifacts. Exhibit spaces are staffed by Education Assistants assigned to each space during open hours.

Light-sensitive materials (such as works on paper, photographs, textiles, baskets and other materials) will be sequestered for a minimum of five years between exhibitions of no more than 12 months’ duration to minimize damage and ensure the artifacts’ longevity.

### Outgoing Loans

The Adirondack Experience is committed to providing access to the collections through exhibition and loan to other, qualified institutions. The Adirondack Experience lends only those collection items which are properly accessioned and catalogued. The museum does not lend to individuals. No loan is approved until the Chief Curator, in consultation with the Conservator and Collections Manager, and Registrar, determines that a loan will not

endanger the physical integrity and safety of the borrowed materials or otherwise damage the interests of the Adirondack Experience.

- Borrowing institution sends a letter to the Chief Curator of the Adirondack Experience requesting the loan, specifying dates and title of exhibit, dates of the requested loan period, and venue for exhibition of the requested work of art or artifact(s).
- Curator requests current facilities report form from the borrowing institution. The Conservator and Collections Manager and the Registrar review the report for any potential problems. No loan will be approved without a satisfactory facilities report. Borrowing institutions must also present a certificate of insurance.
- The Conservator and Collections Manager examines the requested object(s) for condition and conservation needs, and creates a condition report. Any special exhibition/display requirements (such as conservation work) are noted and communicated to the borrowing institution. No artifact or work of art will be loaned if the artifact(s) condition will be compromised by such loan.
- The Chief Curator, in consultation with the Conservator and Collections Manager and the Registrar, reviews the loan request, taking into consideration the length of loan, condition of object, light and other environmental factors and any conflicting needs for use of the artifact(s) by the Adirondack Experience.
- Once the loan is approved by the Chief Curator, the Registrar creates a loan contract which is sent to the borrowing institution for signature.
- The Conservator and Collections Manager makes arrangements for properly packing items for transport to the exhibition venue, and may specify repacking instructions for staff of the borrowing institution. The Registrar works with the borrowing institution to make the necessary transportation arrangements.

Any costs associated with the loan, including insurance, conservation, framing and transportation, are borne by the borrowing institution.

### Incoming Loans

The Adirondack Experience may request the loan of objects from other institutions or private owners for a clear and specified use resulting in a public benefit, usually for exhibition purposes. Preference is given to exhibition of the museum's own collection materials, but loans are arranged when a comparable object is not available. The

Registrar, in consultation with the Conservator and Collections Manager, regularly updates and maintains a standard Facility Report Form which is supplied to all lenders.

- Once a loan is approved, the Registrar prepares a Loan Agreement Form, which is countersigned by the lender or an authorized representative.
- A receipt form is completed when the loaned object(s) arrives at the museum.
- The Conservator and Collections Manager unpacks and photographs the object(s) and generates a condition report.
- The Registrar creates a loan folder that contains the loan agreement, condition report, and all correspondence relating to the loan, and creates a record in the automated system. All loans are given a unique number.
- All loaned materials are treated with the same care as the Adirondack Experience's permanent collection: all handling, storage, security and environmental requirements for the permanent collection apply to loaned objects. Any particular requirements specified by lenders are met according to the loan agreement.
- Once loaned objects have been returned to their owners, the database and paper records are updated. Loan records are kept indefinitely.

## **Reproduction and Copyright**

Copyright law in the United States is defined by the Copyright Act of 1976 as amended and incorporated into the United States Code as Title 17 ([www.copyright.gov/title17/](http://www.copyright.gov/title17/)). Copyright exists separately from ownership of the physical work, which means that the Adirondack Experience does not necessarily own copyright to the works in its possession. Since March 1, 1989, it is not necessary for creators under US law to register copyright with the Copyright Office, nor is it necessary to include copyright notice on a work. Copyright is inherent in original work from the moment it exists in tangible form—from the moment of creation, whether or not the creator has applied for copyright to the work.

Adirondack Experience staff will provide photographs of works in the museum collection to researchers on request. Users are expected to abide by all copyright and intellectual property laws. The Adirondack Experience will provide copyright information and restrictions when they are known, and may require proof of permission from the copyright holder before making any reproductions. It is the obligation of the user to determine and satisfy copyright and other restrictions.

Researchers may use their own photographs of collection materials for personal use; if they plan to use them in published form, they must fill out a Permission to Reproduce form and obtain permission from the Chief Curator.

## **Care of Collections**

The Adirondack Experience is committed to maintaining the proper balance between preservation for future generations of museum audiences and use of collections as an educational resource. Preservation and access are fundamental to the Adirondack Experience's mission. We are committed to the appropriate care and use of the cultural heritage of the Adirondack region in our custody.

The Adirondack Experience will take action to ensure that the collections are safeguarded from fire, earthquake, flood, and natural disasters, and from theft and vandalism. Appropriate environmental conditions are maintained in collections storage and exhibition areas to maximize the life and condition of collection objects.

### Storage of collections

The Collections Manager has charge of ensuring that collections storage areas are kept in good working order and that all objects have an assigned storage space. The Conservator is responsible for ensuring that any object in need of conservation is cared for in a timely fashion and that objects are packed and shipped in an appropriate manner. Objects moved from storage for any purpose are tracked in the collections database. All location changes and dates of the changes are noted in the collections database.

All collection objects are assigned and marked with a unique number (object identification number). The manner in which the object is marked is based on the type of object and is to be non-invasive and removable by a conservator should the item be deaccessioned.

The Collections Manager has responsibility for conducting regular inventories of collections. Condition assessments are a part of this procedure. Objects found to be missing are flagged immediately in the database.

### Handling procedures

Staff charged with the care and use of collection materials are trained in proper handling procedures. Researchers may, when appropriate, handle objects under the supervision of authorized staff. Use of collections for any purpose is monitored for improper handling techniques. Staff make all copies for researchers to ensure material is handled appropriately.

## **Documentation**

The Collections Manager and the Registrar are responsible for maintaining and preserving all records relating to the collections. These records include, but are not limited to, information concerning: provenance, accessioning and deaccessioning, incoming and outgoing loans, conservation, exhibition and publication history, insurance, storage location, and ownership and copyright status. All Curators are responsible for cataloguing collections materials in a timely and accurate fashion. The Collections Manager maintains the collection database and the online collection database.

### Human remains and sacred objects

The Adirondack Experience recognizes that collecting and exhibiting artifacts of a religious, funerary, or ceremonial nature may be culturally sensitive. Museum staff treat all artifacts with appropriate reverence, respecting the beliefs and customs of the cultures and societies the objects may represent. Collections Department staff will follow special handling instructions and/or restrictions as indicated by certain cultures when moving or installing certain objects. Staff encourage members of associated tribes, cultural, ethnic, and religious groups to participate in the interpretation of such artifacts and to share their knowledge.

The Adirondack Experience is in full compliance with all provisions of the North American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA).

## **INSURANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT**

### **Insurance**

The Adirondack Experience maintains a blanket policy to insure the permanent collection and loans. This insurance includes coverage on premises, in transit, and at other locations with policy limits per occurrence.

### **Risk Management**

The Adirondack Experience does not view insurance as a substitute for sound risk management, which includes security and security systems, facilities maintenance, pest management, fire detection and suppression systems, environmental monitoring, collection preservation, care, handling, storage, installation, packing, shipping, record keeping, inventory, access, and disaster planning. As such, risk management is a responsibility shared across departments. Communication between the Collections, Buildings and Grounds, and frontline staff are essential to ensuring the safety and security of the museum's collections, as well as visitors and staff.

## Security of collections

Ensuring the security and safety of the collections of the Adirondack Experience is imperative in the performance of the museum's fiduciary responsibilities.

Exhibit spaces are monitored during open hours to ensure the safety of visitors and the security of the collections. Middle Storage is kept locked at all times. CSSC is locked and alarmed unless authorized staff are present. The art, library and photograph vaults; the *Artists and Inspiration* galleries; and the temporary exhibition galleries are locked and alarmed after hours. Security codes to collections storage spaces are issued to staff from the Collections Department, Library, and Buildings and Grounds. Security codes to exhibition spaces are issued to staff from the Collections Department, Library, Interpretation Department, Buildings and Grounds, and to select seasonal staff. Each staff member with such access is assigned a unique security code. Access to collections storage areas is limited to Collections, Library and Buildings and Grounds staff. All other staff or volunteers must be accompanied and/or supervised by an approved staff member. A record is generated that documents each use of security codes to enter or alarm secured spaces.

Private contractors **must** be accompanied by an authorized staff member when entering or working in collection storage areas. Non-staff researchers and unauthorized staff may not enter collections storage unless accompanied by a member of the Collections Department.

Staff will not:

- Provide public access to materials that are not accessioned or catalogued
- allow public access without supervision
- allow handling of and/or access to material in fragile or unstable condition
- provide access to researchers known to have damaged or stolen collection materials from the Adirondack Experience or any other museums
- store or place collection items in unsecured areas
- remove, or allow others to remove, objects from museum property without appropriate authorization and documentation

Collection materials will be handled only by Collections and Library staff as well as other staff, contractors, interns and volunteers trained to handle museum collections. Collections Department staff will monitor artifact handling and will provide specific handling instructions to non-Collections Department staff, interns and volunteers working with particular collection materials.

## **Ethics**

Adirondack Experience staff are committed to providing equal access to all researchers, civility and cooperation with colleagues and the public, scholarly integrity, respect for confidential information, and to preservation. All policies and procedures are followed and implemented equally for all researchers and staff.

### Addendums:

#### Forms:

- Receipt
- Deed of Gift
- Accession Record
- Recommendation for Acquisition
- Recommendation for Deaccession
- Loan Agreement
- Conservation Report
- Research Request Form

Sample Catalogue Record

Flow Chart

Adirondack Experience Disaster Plan

Sample Condition Report

Code of Ethics