



**PORTSMOUTH**  
*Historical Society*

COLLECTIONS POLICY

To be reviewed and adopted by the Board of Directors, May 2021

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## **1. Mission Statement and Purpose**

### **1.1 Mission**

The Portsmouth Historical Society (the Society) is dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of Portsmouth, Rhode Island's history.

### **1.2 Purpose**

The Society is a nonprofit 501(c)3 volunteer organization founded in 1938. The Society collects and preserves the artifacts, photographs, documents, publications and other items that relate to the history of Portsmouth, Rhode Island, and acts as a resource and facility for the education of the public regarding the history of Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

The Society shall maintain its buildings and grounds.

## **2. Purpose of Collections Management Policy**

### **2.1 Purpose**

This Collections Policy defines the scope of the Society's permanent collection and establishes the standards for the management and care of the Society's collection of housewares, art, furniture, textiles, agricultural equipment, photographs, documents, maps, publications, books, genealogical records, and other items. This document also addresses the roles and responsibilities of the parties responsible for the collection.

### **2.2 Authority**

This Collections Policy adheres to the guidelines and criteria specified by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and the Society of American Archivists (SAA).

### **3. Code of Ethics**

#### **3.1 Responsibilities**

The Board of Directors (the Board), Committees and Curator hold a collective responsibility to preserve and maintain the Society's permanent collection that is held in public trust. The Society shall maintain and adhere to appropriate policies to fulfill these responsibilities.

#### **3.2 Appraisals**

The Board, Committees, Curator and volunteers do not provide appraisals of items donated or brought in to the Society.

#### **3.3 Personal Use**

The Society's collections are not for personal use outside of the Society nor for any purpose contrary to the Society's mission.

However, an item from the Society's collection may be signed out to an individual under exceptional circumstances to be determined by the Curator or President, for a specified amount of time and with the express written approval of the Curator or President. A sign-out log will be kept of the item(s) removed. The status of the item will be noted in PastPerfect, the Society's collection management software, as well.

### **4. Scope of Collections**

#### **4.1 Scope**

The Society maintains a broad collection of items that document Portsmouth's social, religious, political, medical, military, archeological and agricultural heritage. The Society also maintains a collection of general items pertaining to the history of the United States as a whole, as this was an additional focus of the Society's mission when the Society was first formed. The Society's permanent collection includes but is not limited to, housewares, art, furniture, textiles, agricultural equipment, photographs, documents,

maps, publications, books, genealogical records and other items that relate to the history of Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

The Society is responsible to safeguard and hold in public trust these items in perpetuity. The Society currently maintains a database using a collection management software called PastPerfect. Items (such as facilities items, office supplies, equipment, etc.) that are not part of the permanent collection as documented in PastPerfect are not considered as part of this policy.

#### 4.2 Portsmouth Historical Society Properties

The Portsmouth Historical Society owns and maintains the following properties:

1. The Christian Union Church (1865)
2. The Southermost School (1725)
3. The Old Town Hall (c. 1846)
4. Storage Shed

All properties above are physically located at 870 E Main Road in Portsmouth (Plat # 57-1 and 57-37).

The Society uses these properties as a museum and collections facility in order to fulfil its mission. Some material is currently stored at the Glen Manor House in Portsmouth and a small display of artifacts belonging to the Society is on display at the Portsmouth Free Public Library. Other displays or exhibits may from time to time be featured elsewhere. The physical location of each item will be marked in the item's catalog record in PastPerfect.

## **5. Acquisitions and Accessions**

### 5.1 General

When considering an acquisition, the Society will determine if it is able in good faith to catalog, maintain, store and preserve all or part of the acquisition.

The Society does not assign a monetary value to acquisitions, as once the acquisitions are accessioned into the collection, the intent is that the item or items are held in perpetuity for the public and not for sale.

The Society may assign a conservation value for insurance purposes if and when appropriate.

### 5.2 Acquisition Standards

The Curator and Curator Committee may use the following questions as a basis to assist in determining whether or not an acquisition should be accessioned:

- Does the item pertain to Portsmouth history?
- Does the item further the Society's mission?
- Is the item original?
- Are photographs of individuals identified?
- Do we know the provenance of the item?
- What is the condition of the item?
- Is the Society able to care for the item appropriately?
- Does the item represent a topic that is not well covered in our collections?
- Are there any restrictions that the donor is placing on the item for future use or exhibit?

### 5.3 Collecting Authority

Members of the Board, Curator and docents may receive a donation on the Society's behalf. The terms and conditions of any restrictions on the item(s) must be expressed on the *Acquisition Form*. The Curator will sign off on the *Acquisition Form* to approve whether or not an acquisition will be accessioned. Two copies of the form must be signed by both the donor and the Society's representative receiving the donation. One copy is to be retained by the donor.

Purchases of an item or items, regardless of amount, are to be recommended by the Curation Committee and presented to and approved by the Board.

## 6. Deaccessioning and Disposal

### 6.1 Deaccessioning

To deaccession is to remove an item from the collection that has been previously cataloged. Items identified for deaccession will be recommended by the Curation Committee and presented to the Board for approval. All deaccessions will be permanently noted in the item's catalog record in PastPerfect.

Deaccessioning an item from the collection is meant to improve the overall quality and scope of the museum's collection while being transparent and maintaining the public's trust. Examples of why an item might be considered for deaccession are noted in Section 6.2.

Material included in general subject research files are not subject to accession and deaccession procedures and may be disposed of per the discretion of the Curator.

### 6.2 Reasons for Deaccessioning

The Curator Committee may use the following examples as a basis to consider whether or not an item should be presented to the board for deaccessioning:

- The item does not further the mission or research needs of the Society.

- The item is a duplicate of another item of superior quality.
- The physical condition of the item is extremely poor and can not be conserved.
- The item has no historical significance or provenance.
- The item has been determined to be a forgery or reproduction.
- The item poses a risk to other items in the collection or staff due to mold or other issue.
- The item has been stolen, lost, or missing for an extended length of time.
- The item is a fragment or piece of a missing whole.
- The item has been destroyed.

### 6.3 Disposing of deaccessioned items

The Board will determine the appropriate method of disposal if and when an item is voted and approved to be deaccessioned. Examples of disposal methods might include:

1. Donating the item(s) to an institution whose mission better aligns with the item.
2. Donating or selling the item in a transparent, well-documented and fair manner.
3. Destroyed if of no market value.

Items that are properly deaccessioned may not be sold in the museum's gift shop.

## **7. Loans**

### 7.1 Accepting Loans

The Curation Committee may accept an incoming loan that is exceptional in nature and/or is an item that will significantly contribute and enhance a temporary or permanent exhibit. If an item is given to the Society on loan, a temporary loan agreement must be signed by both the Curator and the owner of the item. The agreement must also specify the length or loan period of the item and whether insurance will be required.



## 7.2 Outgoing Loans

The Society currently maintains a small exhibit at the Portsmouth Library that is regularly rotated by the Curation Committee. The Society may identify other external sites to exhibit its collections. An agreement will be drafted between the Society and the loanee. The remote site must have applicable climate control and security. Any items out on loan will be marked appropriately in PastPerfect.

## 8. Care of Collections

### 8.1 Preservation and Security

The Society adheres to best practices and guidelines for the maintenance and housing of its collections.

The Society's main building (Christian Union Church) is monitored by security and fire alarm systems.

## 9. Collections Records and Documentation

The Society maintains both electronic and original paper files regarding the acquisition, accessioning, cataloging and deaccessioning (if applicable) of its objects and archives. The Society's collections catalog is maintained through PastPerfect and is hosted by the company.

## 10. Public Access

The Society provides public access to its collections through a variety of exhibits, lectures and events.

The Society regularly communicates with its members and informs them on recent exhibits and acquisitions through the Society's e-newsletter. The Society also allows discretionary access to its archive collections, photographs and other primary sources typically not on display.

## 11. Review

The Curator and Governance Committees shall review this policy at least bi-annually and make recommendations to the Board who may approve revisions with a simple majority vote.