

**ACQUISITION POLICIES  
and PROCEDURES**

**of the**



**RAILROAD MUSEUM OF  
LONG ISLAND**

**ADOPTED 5/14/2019**

# ACQUISITION POLICIES & PROCEDURES

## I. ACCESSIONS

- 1.1** The Railroad Museum of Long Island (RMLI) adds to its collections in order to improve their quality and enhance their educational value. The Board of Trustees accepts these items into the collection upon the recommendation of the Collections Management Team, accepting responsibility for stewardship only after establishing clear and legal title.
- 1.2** Items are recommended for acquisition and accessioning to the Board of Trustees by the Chairman of the Collections Management Team or by Trustees who serve as liaison with other organizations such as the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) or the National Railway Historical Society (NRHS). If necessary, interim approval may be given by the Collections Management Team Chair between regular meetings of the Board of Trustees.
- 1.3** The Museum will consider items for acquisition and accessioning only if the following conditions are met:

  - A.** The item is relevant to and consistent with the purposes of the Museum or can be used in the future for those purposes.
  - B.** The Museum's staff will properly care for the item, assuring its availability for educational purposes in accordance with professionally accepted standards.
  - C.** The item comes with free and clear title and adequate documentation as to origin and provenance, as far as can be reasonably ascertained.

**D.** The Museum intends to keep the item permanently in the collection as long as the item retains its physical integrity, authenticity, and usefulness for the Museum's purposes. In addition, the Collections Management Team will weigh the item's importance to the collection and its condition, rarity, value, and copyright status before recommending acquisition.

**1.4** The Railroad Museum of Long Island will not knowingly accept material of illicit origin or doubtful title into the collection. Should accessioned material later prove to be of questionable origin, the RMLI will contact the appropriate authorities and make reasonable efforts to resolve the problem ethically and in accordance with the law.

**1.5** The Museum acquires collection items through gift, purchase, or exchange. Since the collections may grow and change with the changing needs of the Museum's constituency, the RMLI generally will accept only unrestricted gifts. If, in the judgment of the Collections Management Team, circumstances suggest the consideration of a restricted gift, the matter will be referred to the Board of Trustees for a decision.

**1.6** The Museum is not bound to accept a gift or bequest if the Collections Management Team determines the items do not warrant acceptance. The Collections Management Team may refuse items outright upon finding the material inappropriate for consideration. If an item inappropriate to the Museum's collection is of museum quality, however, the Team may suggest other suitable institutions to the donor.

- 1.7** The Railroad Museum of Long Island will consider a gift or bequest of a group of items with the clear understanding that only those items deemed appropriate will be accessioned. The other items will be returned to the donor or disposed of in a proper manner with the concurrence of the donor, the donor's heirs or legatees, or their legal representatives. In such cases, the Collections Management Team will make an inventory of the items to be disposed of and outline the method of disposal. The Team representative will then obtain the donor's signature on this form, with one copy to go to the donor and the original remaining with the Museum.
- 1.8** The Board of Trustees may, periodically, designate certain funds for the purchase of collections. The Collections Management Team may use these funds, subject to an adequate cash balance under approval of the Board, to purchase items for the collection per the dollar limit per purchase established by the Board of Trustees. Purchases over the established dollar limit will require Board approval. Any purchase exceeding the amount in the collection fund will require Board approval. The Team will report all purchases to the Board.
- 1.9** Artifacts may be acquired by exchange with another not-for-profit educational institution only if the Museum and the other institution deem the transfer to be in the best interests of both repositories. The institutions will follow the proper deaccessioning procedures as outlined by their respective collection policies, and will fully document all aspects of the exchange. Formal appraisals may be required to ascertain the equality of the transfer. All exchanges will require approval by the Collections Management Team and the Board of Trustees. Since an exchange involves the deaccessioning of material from the collection the Museum must be assured

that the transfer is legal, open, and in the best interests of the Museum.

- 1.10** No item can be accessioned until it has arrived at the Museum and been examined by the Collections Management Team. A legal instrument of conveyance adequately describing the item and the legal conditions of transfer must accompany the gift, purchase, or exchange. Once the Museum has acquired title to the object through a legal instrument of conveyance, the donor or seller no longer has any legal claim to the object. All items accepted into the collection of the Museum become the exclusive property of the Museum, and, if unrestricted, may be displayed, loaned, retained, or disposed of in the best interests of the Museum and the public it serves.
- 1.11** The Museum, as far as reasonable, lawful, and possible, will avoid competing with other local not-for-profit educational institutions for acquisitions. The collection policy defines the areas of collecting interest of the Museum and establishes the limits of potential competition with other local institutions.
- 1.12** To avoid possible conflicts of interest, the staff of the Railroad Museum of Long Island may not appraise or authenticate items for others, whether institutions or members of the general public. The staff may, however, establish values for the insurance purposes of the Museum. If the donor wishes an appraisal of donated items, the donor must arrange for an outside appraisal.

## **II. DOCUMENTATION and CARE PROCEDURES**

- 2.1** The Museum staff will promptly register, accession, and catalog all new acquisitions. A Receipt describing the artifact will be filled out and a copy given to the donor at the time that the object is acquired by the Museum. The Receipt acknowledges the Museum's responsibility for the artifacts, which will be cared for as part of the permanent collection.
- 2.2** Any object left with the Museum without being accepted will be returned to the owner. If the owner does not claim the object within a specified time or cannot be found, the artifact will be disposed of according to procedures established by the Collections Management Team.
- 2.3** Items may be presented by others for the approval of the Collections Management Team at its next meeting. If the Team accepts the artifacts, the item will be properly registered, accessed, and cataloged. The Certificate of Donation will be sent to the donor for their signature, and upon return of this, a copy with an acknowledgement of the donation for tax purposes will be sent.
- 2.4** All original records will be kept in the Museum's files, with a duplicate set in the Museum Archives and on the museum's server. All registration materials in the files shall remain accessible to Museum staff so that accession numbers are not duplicated. All items will be marked with a unique accession number and placed in the proper storage location and in archival quality storage materials.

### **III. STEWARDSHIP**

- 3.1** The stewardship of the museum’s collections entails the highest public trust and carries with it the presumption of rightful ownership, permanence, care, documentation, accessibility and responsible disposal.
- 3.2** Therefore, the Collections Management Team of the Museum ensures:
- A.** Collections in its custody support the Museum’s mission and public trust responsibilities.
  - B.** Collections in its custody are lawfully held, protected, secured, unencumbered, cared for and preserved.
  - C.** Collections are accounted for and documented.
  - D.** Access to the collections and related information is permitted and regulated.
  - E.** Acquisition, disposal, and loan activities are conducted in a manner that respects the protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources and discourages illicit trade in such materials.
  - F.** Acquisition, disposal, and loan activities conform to the Museum’s mission and public trust responsibilities.
  - G.** Disposal of collections through sale, trade or research activities is solely for the advancement of the Museum’s mission. Proceeds from the sale of collections are to be used consistent with the established standards of the Museum's discipline, but in no event shall they be used for anything other than acquisition or direct care of collections.

- H. Collections-related activities promote the public good rather than individual financial gain.
- I. Competing claims of ownership that may be asserted in connection with objects in its custody should be handled openly, seriously, responsively and with respect for the dignity of all parties involved.

## **IV. COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT TEAM**

The Railroad Museum of Long Island's collection of railroad artifacts is a great asset for the Museum. The Collections Management Team has a legal, ethical, and fiduciary obligation to provide for its safekeeping. It is responsible for creating and administering acquisition policies and procedures for the Museum's collection. The Team consists of an Administrator, Accessions Chair, Curator(s), and a Registrar. The roles of the Team members are defined in the sections below.

### **4.1 Administrator, (*President*)**

The Administrator, (*President*), is responsible for a multitude of tasks, including but not limited to fundraising, media relations, budgeting, facilities management, human resources, marketing, and developing community outreach programs and educational events. The Administrator regulates social media outlets, composes newsletters, and secures financial grants. Furthermore, the Administrator serves as the liaison with local, state and federal agencies to ensure compliance with laws and safety regulations. In addition, the Administrator oversees the Collections Management Team, the Audit and Safety Committees, the Board of Trustees and all volunteers responsible for the day to day operations of the Museum.



## 4.2 Accessions Chair

The Accessions Chair is responsible, along with the Collections Management Team, for the acquisition and preservation of the Museum's physical and digital collections. The Accessions Chair is responsible for decisions regarding the selection of new items based on their potential historical significance to the Museum's mission. Furthermore, the Accessions Chair evaluates current objects in the collection and ensures the proper methods of documentation and safekeeping. The Accessions Chair conducts continual research on the collection and shares the research findings with the public through publication, presentations, education programs and exhibitions.

## 4.3 Curator(s)

The Curator ensures the proper care and preservation of objects within the Museum. The Curator supervises members of the Collection Management Team, archivists, and the Museum staff. The Curator is responsible for the acquisition, restoration, conservation, display and disposition of an artifact. The Curator is responsible for planning the departmental budget, providing expenditure projections, and raising funds in the form of grant writing.

- A. Acquisition: During acquisition consideration, reporting to the Collection Management Team, the Curator will research the object, determine its potential benefits to the collection, ensure proper resources for its care, and establish the object's origin.
- B. Object Care: The Curator is responsible for the safekeeping of objects and training the Museum's staff on proper handling procedures. The Curator monitors the condition and environment of objects in storage and on exhibit. The Curator cleans and prepares objects for storage and exhibition.
- C. Inventory: A key responsibility of the Curator is maintaining a detailed inventory of all items in the Museum's possession.

- D.** Knowledge, Abilities, and Skills: The Curator is responsible for accurate identification and safeguarding of objects, artifacts, and specimens within the Museum's collection. In addition, the Curator is an integral part of the Emergency Management Team.

#### **4.4 Registrar**

The Registrar is responsible for the documentation and record keeping of the Museum's collection. The documentation includes pertinent information regarding an object's condition, provenance, and location within the museum or if out on loan.

- A.** Database Management: The Registrar is responsible for the entry of an object's information into the Museum's database management system. The proper input, safeguarding, maintenance and backup of this data is imperative. The database is used to analyze, manage, and facilitate communications. The collection is available to researchers and the public via physical or cyber means.
- B.** Acquisitions: When an object arrives at the Museum for the first time as a prospective addition to the collection, the Registrar will be notified.
- C.** Knowledge, Abilities, and Skills: A Registrar is considered a Subject Management Expert (SME) in historical and cultural significance of the museum's collection. The Registrar is considered a key member of the leadership team and is a liaison with different departments within the Museum, the President and the Board of Trustees.

## V. COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT

This Collection Management section is a guide for the development and care of the collection, which is consistent with the Museum's mission and existing professional museum standards.

- 5.1** Entering the Collection: Upon acquisition of an object, the Curator initiates the accession process by careful examination of the object to determine if it is significant to the Museum's mission. If the item is deemed significant, the intake process will commence and the object will be classified based on the Museum's specific guidelines. The object will be provided a unique identifying number, measured, photographed, documented and entered into the Museum's computer database by the Registrar. Conversely, if the item is deemed not relevant to the Museum's mission, the item will be returned to the donor, transferred to another museum or be presented to the gift shop for public sale.
- 5.2** Risk Management: The Collections Management Team will identify potential risk factors affecting the Museum's collection. Risk factors may include vandalism, theft, pests, emergencies and manmade or natural disasters. The Collections Management Team will develop and implement mitigation strategies designed to minimize these risks. Mitigation strategies may include but not be limited to environmental controls (*HVAC, light and humidity*), alarm systems (*intrusion, burglar, water and fire*), guards, CCTV systems and video/audio recorders and secure display cases. Additionally, the Team oversees the development and implementation of the General Operating Safety Rules designed to safeguard both the staff and collection in case of emergency. The Collection Management Team conducts periodic risk management surveys.

- 5.3** Environmental Control: Dust, pests, light exposure, temperature extremes or fluctuations and relative humidity may adversely affect the condition of artifacts. The Curator is responsible for monitoring environmental controls, maintaining a pest management system, coordinating a housekeeping routine, and ensuring the security of all artifacts located on the Museum's property.
- 5.4** Incoming Loans for Exhibit: Artifacts are loaned between museums for a variety of reasons. Upon their arrival, the Registrar will carefully examine and document the physical condition of all incoming artifacts on loan to the RMLI. If the object is accepted, the Registrar will ensure the safekeeping of the artifact until the Curator is ready to prepare it for exhibit at the RMLI.
- 5.6** Outgoing Loans for Exhibit: At the request of a qualified borrowing institution, the Curator retrieves objects from storage and conducts an examination for potential exhibition or loan consideration. After close examination, the Curator determines the object's current condition, fragility level and special exhibition or shipping requirements as a prerequisite for exhibition. Artifacts determined not to be able to withstand the stresses of travel and/or exhibit shall be returned to safe storage and will not be loaned out. The Registrar will notify the requesting institution of the Museum's decision. Once objects are approved for exhibition or loan, the Curator ensures their safe transport and installation by monitoring and/or assisting with the exhibit's installation and removal.
- 5.7** Packing and Shipping: When artifacts are received or transported out of the Museum, the Registrar will update the database and note the condition of the artifact. The Registrar will oversee the packing for shipment and loading into the shipping vehicle.

- 5.8** Security in Transit: All objects on outgoing loan are accompanied by a courier. The Registrar selects and trains individuals in the proper methods of securing an artifact in transport. Museum personnel with prior law enforcement, military or security backgrounds will be considered first for this assignment. The Registrar is required to accompany artifacts in transit which are deemed to be rare or valuable to the Museum's mission.

**APPENDIX:  
ACCESSION AND LOAN FORM**

**VI. DEACCESSION**

- 6.1** The Railroad Museum of Long Island supports the disposition guidelines adopted by the New York State Association of Museums. The manner of disposition will be in the best interests of the RMLI, society, and the public trust it represents. The Museum also supports the principle that material which represents the cultural or historical heritage of a region, state, or nation should remain in that region, state, or nation.
- 6.2** The Museum will dispose of deaccessioned items through public sale, gift, or exchange to not-for-profit educational institutions. When considering disposal to another institution, the Museum will carefully consider the institution's ability to care for the item before approving the transfer. The Museum will consider an exchange of items with another institution only if the transfer involves items of comparable value. Appraisals will be conducted by both institutions to establish parity, although other considerations, such as the item's importance to the collection, will be considered. Full records of all exchanges are kept in the museum's permanent files. Any capital generated by the sale of deaccessioned material will be added to the collection fund, for the acquisition or conservation of items. The Collections

Management Team may, at its discretion, require that the original donor of a deaccessioned item be recognized as a contributor to the purchase of a new acquisition.

- 6.3** When considering an object for deaccession, the Collections Management Team will make every reasonable effort to establish the Museum's clear title to the object and determine if any restrictions apply. The Museum normally will respect mandatory conditions but reserves the right to take appropriate legal action to remove such conditions if, in the judgment of the Team and the Board of Trustees, such action is necessary and proper. Restrictions generally will be honored when consonant with the Museum's mission. If any questions arise concerning possible donor restrictions on the object, the Registrar will seek clarification from the donor, if possible, and/or the advice of legal counsel, if appropriate. The Collections Management Team will make the final determination on objects eligible for deaccession. Conversely, the Team will seek approval from the President and the Board of Trustees for the deaccession of artifacts of significant historical or monetary value.
- 6.4** Historically, the Museum accepts all donations. Subsequently, donated items with diminutive or no relationship to the history of railroading on Long Island or the Museum's mission are placed in storage until their deaccession and removal from the Museum's collection. The Museum's storage space is at a premium, therefore, it is not prudent to maintain objects which will not be displayed or added to the collection. The Registrar evaluates all donations and articulates recommendations to the Collections Management Team for their accession or deaccession.