

BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
COLLECTIONS POLICY 2008

MISSION STATEMENT

The Brooklyn Historical Society (“BHS”) connects the past to the present and makes Brooklyn’s vibrant history tangible, relevant, and meaningful for today’s diverse communities, and for generations to come.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND & COLLECTING OBJECTIVES

Founded in 1863, the Long Island Historical Society functioned as a library, museum, and urban education center dedicated to the people of Brooklyn, providing opportunities for civic dialogue and thoughtful engagement. The Long Island Historical Society was founded “...to discover, procure, and preserve whatever may relate to general history, to the natural, civil, literary and ecclesiastical history of the United States, the State of New York and more particularly of the counties, cities, towns and villages of Long Island.”

In the early 1980s the Board of Trustees and staff recognized that such ambition, however worthy, was unrealistically broad in scope. The collecting parameters had to be narrowed and refined not only to better serve the community, but also to provide the best care for the collections. With the name change from The Long Island Historical Society to The Brooklyn Historical Society in 1985, BHS firmly established its purpose to collect and document the history and culture of Brooklyn.

Upon closing for extensive building renovations in 1997, the collections were placed in temporary storage. The building reopened to the public in 2003 with exhibitions and programs. After extensive retrospective cataloging, the library reopened to the public in 2006. BHS functions today as a museum, research library, educational center, and historical society.

SCOPE OF THE COLLECTIONS

BHS collects, preserves, and makes available materials relating to Brooklyn’s diverse people and cultures, past and present. This policy covers BHS collections of Brooklyn-related material including: the fine arts, decorative arts including textiles, folk arts, popular culture, household, industrial, and special collections as defined, and library

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materials that are of significance or value such as photography, maps, manuscript and archival materials and rare books.

ACQUISITIONS

Acquisition of materials for BHS involves the discovery, preliminary evaluation, negotiation for, taking custody of, documenting title to, and acknowledging receipt of materials and objects.

Criteria

The same standards of acquisition shall be applied to both donations and purchases. Donations and purchases must meet all the following standards of acquisition before they can be acquired or accepted by BHS:

1. The acquisition must conform to BHS's collecting objectives, as set out in the Collection Development Policy (see Appendix A).
2. BHS must be able to store, process, make accessible, and properly care for any proposed acquisition.
3. All moral, legal, and ethical implications of the acquisition must be considered.
4. All acquisitions will have full literary rights, property rights, copyrights, and be free from any donor restrictions. The donor must have clear title to the material and sign a Deed of Gift assigning all rights to BHS. Exceptions will be made on a case by case basis and noted in the Deed of Gift.
5. When possible, provenance must be documented for the donation or purchase.

Acquisition Procedure

The President must be advised of all potential purchases over \$100, which he or she then approves or disapproves. The President will present each proposed purchase of over \$1,000 to the Collections Committee of the Board of Trustees for approval. If there are questions regarding the acceptance of a donation, the President will make the decision, in consultation with the Collections Committee. The President will provide written reports to the Board of Trustees regarding acquisitions, including accessions and deaccessions, four times per year. These written reports will be retained in the institutional archives.

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No officers, trustees, employees, or volunteers associated with BHS shall offer appraisals of the monetary value of materials or objects. No officers, trustees, employees, or volunteers associated with BHS should be referred or recommended by BHS as appraisers or sell objects to BHS as dealers. The appraised value of the donation is the responsibility of the donor. All donors desiring an income tax deduction for gifts made to BHS must obtain an independent appraisal. Upon request, BHS will refer donors to the American Society of Appraisers.

If an officer, trustee, employee, or volunteer of BHS purchases material which falls within the collection scope of BHS, he or she must inform the President. The President determines if the purchase is acceptable to BHS. The institution has the right of first refusal. The material must also be made available for curatorial examination; all bills, receipts, or other documents must also be made available to the curatorial staff. BHS has the right to purchase the materials from the officer, trustee, employee or volunteer at the price he or she paid. If BHS does purchase the material from the officer, trustee, employee or volunteer, he or she will be promptly reimbursed.

ACCESSIONS

Collections staff shall maintain a permanent record of acquisition files or transfer documentation which shall contain all pertinent information as to the source and conveyance of each acquisition. All materials added to BHS's collections shall be processed as per the Accessions Packet (see Appendix B attached), adopted by the President in conjunction with Collections staff, and shall become part of a continuous record of all accessions. Objects found in the collection lacking accession documentation and falling within the Collection Development Policy shall be accessioned (see Appendix A attached).

DEACCESSIONS

The process of permanently removing accessioned items that do not meet the collecting objectives defined in the Collection Development Policy (see Appendix A) will be considered for deaccessioning with extreme care and caution. The overall deaccession process will be undertaken deliberately with a goal toward eventual improvements in collection holdings. BHS will not deaccession any accessioned materials that have been lost or stolen from its collections. Items found in the collection lacking accession

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documentation and falling outside of the BHS Collection Policy shall not be accessioned. Attempts to return items shall be made. Failing that, disposal or transfer shall be approved or determined by the collections staff.

Deaccessioning Criteria

The following criteria will be used when considering any object for deaccession. The material need only meet one of the criteria to be considered for deaccessioning.

1. The material is outside the scope of BHS's mission statement and Collections Development Policy (see Appendix A).
2. The material is a duplicate.
3. BHS is unable to care for or preserve the material.
4. The material lacks physical integrity or has deteriorated beyond any usefulness.
5. The material is deemed to be a fake or forgery with no historical value.
6. BHS's possession of the material is not legitimate (e.g., the material may have been stolen or removed illegally in violation of applicable state, federal, and international law).
7. The material was acquired via a one-time or finite licensing agreement with another institution for the purpose of an exhibit, publication, or program.
8. The material was given an accession number in error.

Deaccessioning Procedures

The President or collections staff may recommend deaccessioning of an accessioned item if, in her/his best judgment, one or more of the above criteria for deaccessioning have been met.

The recommendation for deaccessioning must be made in writing to the Board and must contain the source or provenance of the material, where available; the reason(s) for deaccessioning; the recommended means of disposal; and the estimated market value, if known. Before any material is recommended for deaccessioning, reasonable efforts must be made to determine that BHS is free to do so. Where any restrictions to the disposition of materials are found, the following procedures must be used:

1. Mandatory conditions of acquisition will be strictly observed unless deviation from their terms is authorized by a court of competent jurisdiction.

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2. The staff will seek legal counsel in the event any question concerning intent or restrictions is raised.

The means of disposal will be determined on a case by case basis, in accordance with state and federal laws and may include exchange, sale by public auction, destruction, transfer, or donation. A list of the items recommended for deaccessioning will be presented by the President to the Collections Committee for approval, and then presented to the full Board of Trustees for final approval. Any deaccessioned materials shall not be given, sold, or otherwise transferred, publicly or privately, to BHS's employees, volunteers, trustees, or officers, or to their immediate families or representatives. All proceeds resulting from the deaccession of materials from the permanent collections of BHS shall be used to support the general care and maintenance of the BHS's collections. The President will provide written reports to the Board of Trustees regarding deaccessions, four times per year. These reports will be retained in the institutional archives.

Public Disclosure and Deaccession Records

As a courtesy, BHS may notify the donor, if alive, or his or her heirs, if the material was accessioned within the last ten years. When the creator and donor are not the same, BHS may also notify the living creator if material is going to be deaccessioned.

LOANS

A loan is a temporary transfer of material from one institution or individual to another without transfer of ownership.

Outgoing Loans

BHS lends materials from its collections only to museums, historical societies, libraries or other institutions that, in BHS's judgment, can comply with the conditions set forth in the loan agreement. Loans will be approved at the discretion of the President in consultation with the Collections Committee. The President will provide written reports to the Board of Trustees regarding loans, four times per year. These reports will be retained within the institutional archive.

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Incoming Loans

BHS takes in loans for exhibit and research purposes. Terms of loan will be defined in the loan agreement and will include security considerations, credit lines, length of the loan period and proof of insurance.

Unclaimed Loans

An unclaimed loan is an object that BHS records indicate was placed on loan with BHS for a fixed or indefinite period, and which has not been retrieved by its owner in a timely fashion.

After BHS has identified an object as an unclaimed loan, the staff will compile all information relating to the object, including all relevant documentation, and make a written record of that information. BHS will then determine whether it wants to return the object to the lender, renew the loan, acquire the loaned object, or dispose of the object through donation, sale or destruction. After making its determination, BHS will undertake a diligent and good faith search for the lender, employing as appropriate the steps outlined in Appendix C, attached. If neither the lender nor his or her heir(s) is located, or no claim is made after actual or constructive notice has been given to the lender, BHS will amend its records to reflect that the object previously on loan has become the property of BHS as of the date of the last letter sent or as of the date of publication of the last public notice.

FINAL STATEMENT

This collections policy is ordered in effect by the Board of Trustees as of *December* 2008. A copy will be made available to any donor or prospective donor upon request. This policy shall be subject to periodic review and updates in order to remain current with any change of emphasis or reevaluation of purpose in BHS's charter.

Appendix C

1. Send a letter to the lender's address, where available, via certified mail with return receipt requested. The letter should describe the object and the date of the loan and requesting that the lender contact the museum within 45 days. The letter should state that if the lender fails to claim the object, BHS will infer that the lender intends to make a gift of the loaned object. BHS should send a second letter containing the same information if the lender does not respond within the designated time period. At the end of 90 days, if the lender still has not responded, BHS will send a third letter notifying the lender that, as a result of the lender's failure to respond, BHS will deem the object donated as of the date of the third letter, and has asserted title to the object.
2. If BHS has no address for the lender, or the initial letter is returned undelivered, BHS should undertake a reasonable search for the lender, using probate records, telephone directories, real estate tax records and death records, as well as any professional or personal associations of the lender.
3. If, after completing a reasonable search, BHS does not know the lender's whereabouts, BHS will consider publishing a notice in appropriate newspapers, in accordance with applicable local law, stating the name of the lender, his or her last known address, a description of the object, and the date of its loan, BHS's contact information, and BHS's intent to terminate the loan and take title to the object if it is not claimed. The same procedure should be used to contact all known heirs of the lender, if the search shows the lender has died.
4. After the lender or the lender's heir(s) have been contacted, BHS will request that the lender or the heir(s) provide proper identification and any documentation he or she has relating to the loan before beginning discussions regarding the disposition of the object.