

**The Athenaeum of Philadelphia**  
**Collections Management Policy**  
**Adopted October 23, 2017**  
**Updated October 17, 2022**

**I. The Mission and Vision of The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.**

A. Mission. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia nurtures curiosity in members and neighbors, strengthening community through learning, discourse and meaningful engagement.

B. Vision. The Athenaeum is an historic and vibrant Philadelphia-centered and member-supported circulating library, research archive and cultural forum dedicated to harnessing its resources – expert staff, collections of books, art and architectural treasures and its National Historic Landmark building – to strengthen its growing community through ideas, cultural engagement and fellowship.

**II. History of the Collections.**

A. Early Years. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia (hereafter referred to as “The Athenaeum”) was founded as a subscription library that provided access to periodicals and nonfiction to its members and guests. The founders aimed to collect materials “connected with the history and antiquities of America, and the useful arts, and generally to disseminate useful knowledge” for the public’s benefit. Items gathered in the early years of the organization form the “legacy” rare book collection and include both monographs and periodicals. After 1855, when The Athenaeum Board agreed to allow books to circulate, more recreational reading was added to the collections, some of which is now in the rare book collection. From the beginning, and increasingly after 1950, The Athenaeum has acquired furniture, paintings, sculpture, decorative arts and other nineteenth-century objects for its collections.

B. Since 1973. The Athenaeum has actively collected materials in areas relating to architecture, the design arts and the built environment, emphasizing architectural drawings, photographs, trade catalogs and new books regarding these subjects. With these collections, The Athenaeum provides Philadelphia and the broader research community with a significant resource of first resort on matters of architecture and design history.

**III. Purpose of the Policy.**

A. This Collections Management Policy, drafted and adopted in 2017, and updated in 2022, documents the policies and practices that currently guide the development and care of The Athenaeum’s collections, in a manner consistent with the mission of The Athenaeum and with professional museum, library and archival standards.

**IV. Collections Committee.**

A. The Collections Committee is a standing committee that advises the Executive Director on the implementation of the policies described in this document.

**V. Policy Review.**

A. The Collections Management Policy should be reviewed by the Collections Committee and the Board of Directors no less than every ten years.

**VI. Scope of the Collections.**

A. The Athenaeum’s collections encompass books, periodicals, manuscripts, photographs, architectural drawings of various kinds, paintings, drawings, sculpture, furniture and decorative arts.

**VII. The Athenaeum Archival Collections.**

A. The Athenaeum actively collects drawings, photographs and other materials that document the built environment of the Philadelphia region from colonization until the middle of the twentieth century. In accessioning, priority is given to materials that:

- A.1. Add to an established collection or fill a hole in a collection,
- A.2. Have visual appeal, and
- A.3. Support new fields of research.

B. Printed materials from this period of interest that support our research collection will also be given priority.

C. The Athenaeum seeks to build a collection that reflects the many diversities of our society.

**VIII. The Athenaeum Museum Object Collection.**

A. The Athenaeum actively collects objects that document its own institutional history; in addition, it actively collects objects that document the built environment and interior and exterior design history of Greater Philadelphia, including the following:

- A.1. Art, including paintings, sculpture, prints and drawings
- A.2. Structural or decorative components or fragments of buildings
- A.3. Furniture
- A.4. Decorative art

**IX. Special Collections.**

A. The Athenaeum will retain several special collections, while not actively collecting, including:

- A.1. Objects that pertain to Joseph Bonaparte during his time in America
- A.2. Objects that pertain to the game of chess
- A.3. Architectural toys
- A.4. Nineteenth-century women's history, including women's periodicals, supplementing our collection of Godey's Lady's Book
- A.5. Publishers' decorated bindings, especially mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century
- A.6. Nineteenth-century (and earlier) children's books

**X. The Athenaeum Library Circulating Collection.**

A. The Library at The Athenaeum of Philadelphia collects the best in contemporary world literature, including literature in translation, as well as notable and award-winning works in biography, history, the arts, the social sciences, travel, popular fiction, mysteries and books about Philadelphia. The Library also collects quality juvenile and young adult selections for its circulating children's collection. Recent titles on art and architecture complement The Athenaeum's extensive archival holdings in architecture and the decorative arts. The Library also subscribes to daily newspapers and leading periodicals of interest to its readership.

**XI. Accession Procedures.**

A. Accession of materials (whether acquired by gift or purchase) shall be overseen by the Board of Directors of The Athenaeum, which delegates certain responsibilities to the staff (Executive Director and appropriate staff) and the appropriate Collections subcommittee. Notwithstanding this delegation, all accessions shall be reported to the Board in a timely manner.

B. The accession process begins with a proposal by the staff to the Executive Director. The proposal should include justification for accession, size, condition, purchase price (if applicable), estimated or appraised value and requirements for stewardship.

C. With the consent of the Executive Director, this proposal is then presented to the appropriate subcommittee, which shall meet quarterly (in advance of Board meetings) to review proposals, and as requested by the Executive Director and staff. The subcommittee shall make recommendations concerning accession to the Executive Director, who has the authority to approve the acquisition and accession of materials with an estimated or appraised value of less than \$5,000 and that do not have unusual or costly stewardship requirements.

D. The Executive Director shall refer to the Board of Directors any proposals for the acquisition and accession of materials with an estimated or appraised value of \$5,000 or more or that have an unusual or costly stewardship requirement.

## **XII. Gifts to The Athenaeum's Research and Circulating Collection.**

A. The Athenaeum selectively accepts the offer of relevant gifts to its circulating collection. These may include gifts of new or gently-used books, DVDs and books on compact disc. Items accepted will be kept only as long as they meet the needs of the collection. The circulating collection is primarily made up of English-language materials.

## **XIII. Collection Maintenance and Weeding.**

A. Professional staff will regularly review items in the collection to ensure that they continue to meet the need of users. Materials no longer in demand, outdated or in poor condition are removed. Lost or damaged items are not automatically replaced. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

## **XIV. Two Terms.**

A. **Acquisitions.** An acquisition occurs when title to an object or collection is transferred by donation or sale to The Athenaeum. Legal transfer of title requires that three conditions be met: (1) the intent of a person or entity to donate is clear; (2) the object is transferred physically to the institution; and (3) the institution formally accepts the donation.

B. **Accession.** Accessioning is the combination of processing and cataloging an object into The Athenaeum's collection; or, if materials have been partially processed and not yet cataloged, assigning to them an accession or other control number that permits temporary shelving or storage and retrieval.

## **XV. Acceptance of Gifts.**

A. The Athenaeum welcomes and accepts the offer of gifts for the collection that are consistent with its Mission statement and in accord with the policies and procedures specified in this document.

A.1. Gifts must be accompanied by a deed of gift signed by both the donor and The Athenaeum's appropriate representative as a warranty of ownership.

A.2. Except under unusual circumstances, as determined by the Board of Directors in each instance, no gift will be accepted with restrictions.

A.3. Appraisals of gifts may be arranged by the Executive Director or appropriate staff, at the request and expense of the donor. Donors who wish to claim gifts for tax purposes must present appropriately filled-out and signed IRS tax forms to The Athenaeum.

A.4. No member of The Athenaeum staff is authorized to offer appraisals.

A.5. The Athenaeum reserves the right to refuse gifts that:

A.5.a) Do not fit The Athenaeum's Mission or Collection Management Policy

A.5.b) Cannot be appropriately housed, processed or maintained within the facilities.

## **XVI. Deaccession Policy.**

A. Introduction and Definition. Deaccessioning is the process used to remove permanently an object from The Athenaeum's collection or to document the reasons for an involuntary removal (one required by law or due to circumstances not controlled by The Athenaeum). The Athenaeum's deaccession policy seeks to strike a practical balance among the following three considerations:

A.1. The fiduciary obligations with respect to the preservation of its collections, which the shareholders, directors and Athenaeum staff owe to the persons who have donated to those collections as a public trust and for those individuals for whose benefit The Athenaeum has undertaken to preserve The Athenaeum's collection.

A.2. The Athenaeum's need periodically to renew and alter its collection policies.

A.3. The Athenaeum's need selectively to refine its existing collections in order that they may remain consistent with these policies.

B. To this end, The Athenaeum has a continuing obligation to review and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of its existing collections. This deaccession policy governs only those materials that have been accessioned, electronically cataloged (through the OOPAC, AAB or PastPerfect) or have paper documentation of The Athenaeum's ownership.

## **XVII. Conditions Warranting Deaccession.**

A. No item in The Athenaeum's collections shall be deaccessioned unless it meets at least one of the following criteria:

A.1. Its retention would be inconsistent with the character of The Athenaeum's collections as a whole and with its current policies and objectives with respect to those collections.

A.2. In the opinion of the staff, the item either lacks authenticity or is so lacking in documentation as to render it valueless for purposes of scholars or public education.

A.3. The item is a duplicate of inferior quality to a similar item in The Athenaeum's collections or has no research or study value.

A.4. The item cannot be adequately stored or cared for.

A.5. The item is in such poor condition or in such poor state of deterioration that it is useless or a burden as part of The Athenaeum's collections.

A.6. The possibility exists for the item to be traded for some other (and usually similar) item which would be substantially more valuable to and more consistent with The Athenaeum's collections.

A.7. Items may be deaccessioned and repatriated when and where appropriate in keeping with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and any other relevant governmental laws or acts.

## **XVIII. Who Can Authorize Deaccession.**

A. An item intended for deaccession shall be given an estimated dollar value by the Curator, Librarian or Archivist in charge of the collection, and the Executive Director must concur in this valuation. If the valuation is less than \$2,000, deaccession may be authorized by the Executive Director. If the valuation is \$2,000 or more, deaccession must also have the approval of The Athenaeum's Collections Committee. If the valuation is \$5,000 or more, deaccession must also have the approval of The Athenaeum's Collections Committee and the Executive Committee.

## **XIX. Obligations to Donors.**

A. If an item intended for deaccession was obtained by The Athenaeum subject to restrictions that are inconsistent with deaccession, and if the donor is still living, every attempt shall be made to obtain from the donor a written waiver of such restrictions and a signed consent to its deaccession. If the donor refuses to provide such a waiver, The Athenaeum must abide by the terms of the original accession agreement. If the donor is no longer living, it will be necessary to consult legal counsel as to whether the heirs of the estate of the donor can provide such a waiver in his or her place.

B. If an item is held by The Athenaeum without restriction but its donor is still living, the donor should be informed of the intended deaccession even though it is unnecessary to obtain the donor's consent thereto. As far as it complies with IRS regulations, the deaccessioned item may be returned to the donor.

C. In general, all donors of deaccessioned items (or their surviving families) should be courteously and tactfully dealt with and kept informed of any deaccession to the extent deemed necessary and appropriate in the judgment of the Executive Director.

## **XX. Evaluation of The Athenaeum's Title.**

A. No article may be deaccessioned until it has been established that the institution has clear title to it and has full power and authority to transfer such title to others. Special care should be taken to make certain that it is not held by The Athenaeum on loan from some other institution or individual.

## **XXI. Procedure for Deaccessioning.**

A. Procedures. Prior to deaccession, an authorization in writing shall be executed by the Curator, Librarian or Archivist in charge and the Executive Director and placed in The Athenaeum's files. In cases where approval of the Collections Committee and/or the Executive Committee is required, a notation of approval shall be entered in their respective minutes.

B. Notification. The Executive Director shall provide the Board of Directors with annual reports listing all deaccessions made by The Athenaeum. A written memorandum of the facts relating to the disposal of the deaccessioned item and any thing received in exchange or payment thereof shall be prepared and retained as a permanent record of The Athenaeum.

C. Valuations. Those items which in the best estimation of the individual responsible for the material to have a value over \$2,000 will be appraised by an outside appraiser qualified to determine the value of similar materials. Where the deaccession involves a number of related items, they shall be valued as a group.

## **XXII. Disposition of Deaccessioned Items.**

A. Gifts. Items approved for deaccession may be offered as gifts to other nonprofit organizations with policies consistent with The Athenaeum's. No items shall be offered to Athenaeum staff, Board directors or shareholders, nor to any other individuals.

B. Exchanges. The formal reciprocal transfer of items between two or more institutions is desirable if it serves to advance the research, educational or exhibition programs of both parties.

C. Sale. If it is the opinion of the curatorial staff that an item should remain in the public domain, then items may be offered in sale to appropriate and reputable nonprofit institutions, with this sale being suitable publicized so that The Athenaeum obtains the best selling price given the pool of appropriate buyers.

C.1. Whenever possible, items that are sold should be offered at public auction at a reserve price. If the reserve price is not met, then the item may be sold privately for at least the reserve price.

C.2. If the value of an item is too insignificant to warrant its being sold at auction, then the item may be offered for public sale by The Athenaeum. This dollar value will be specified by the Curator and approved by the Executive Director.

C.3. The Athenaeum staff and members of the Board of Directors may not purchase any item placed at public auction through the deaccession procedures outlined here.

D. Proceeds. The proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned items may be used only for acquisition and conservation of collections. Acquisition includes purchase, as well as the cost of processing, housing, scanning and cataloging purchased items.

### **XXIII. Disposal of Items.**

A. If an item has deteriorated to the point that it is of no further use to users, or if it constitutes an uncontrollable hazard, then it may be destroyed.

B. This destruction must comply with any relevant local, state or federal regulations concerning the disposal of such material and must be conducted in such a way as to pose no public hazard, in the best judgment of The Athenaeum. The destruction must be witnessed and attested to in writing by a Curator, Librarian, Archivist or the Executive Director.

### **XXIV. Exclusions from Deaccession Policy**

A. Popular books, periodicals and other materials purchased or received as gifts to the circulating library are excluded from this deaccession policy. This collection can be weeded at the discretion of the Librarian.

### **XXV. Non-Accessioned Items.**



A. The Executive Director may at their discretion dispose of (by sale, exchange, gift or destruction) items found in the collection that meet all of the following criteria:

- A.1. Items that have never been accessioned
- A.2. Items for which no legal transfer documentation can be found
- A.3. Items that have never been electronically cataloged in The OPAC, AAB or PastPerfect
- A.4. Have an estimated value of less than \$1,000

B. These items may not be given, sold or exchanged to any Athenaeum staff member, Board director or shareholder or other person connected to The Athenaeum. An annual written report of the disposal of these items shall be made to the Board of Directors.

## **XXVI. Loans.**

A. Curatorial staff will enter all incoming and outgoing loans into the collection management database. All loan forms are to be kept on file permanently in the collections' office. Loan files shall include correspondence, certificates of insurance, facilities report, packing and shipping information and any other information pertaining to the institution's responsibilities toward loaned or borrowed objects.

B. Standards for Incoming Loans.

- B.1. All incoming loans are accepted solely in support of the mission and programs of The Athenaeum.
- B.2. All borrowing of objects from museums, libraries or private individuals must be done in such a manner that there is no actual or apparent conflict of interest; nor may the lender imply any enhancement of the value of the borrowed objects by their loan to The Athenaeum.
- B.3. The Athenaeum will only borrow objects to which the lender has clear title.
- B.4. There must be a written agreement, signed by The Athenaeum and the lender, stipulating the purpose and duration of the loan, and containing a complete inventory of all the objects being borrowed.
- B.5. The loan agreement must contain complete contact information for the lender and for anyone acting as the lender's agent in picking up the object(s) at the end of the loan period; anyone acting as such agent must have written authorization from the lender. The lender is responsible for informing The Athenaeum in a timely manner of any changes of ownership or of address that affect the loaned object(s).

- B.6. The loan agreement will clearly state acceptable uses of the object(s), or of images of the object(s), and any restrictions.
- B.7. The loan agreement may provide guidelines for the installation of the items.
- B.8. The loan agreement must clearly state who is responsible for insuring the object(s) in transit and during its stay at The Athenaeum, and the lender will provide a value for such coverage, which shall be the sole amount of recovery payable by insurance in the case of loss or damage. The Athenaeum staff will not place a value on any borrowed object(s).
- B.9. If The Athenaeum insures the loan, a certificate of insurance will be provided to the lender.
- B.10. If the lender maintains their own insurance coverage, The Athenaeum must be named as an additional insured under the lender's insurance contract.
- B.11. Should the lender waive insurance, it/they must agree to hold The Athenaeum harmless from any liability for damages to, or loss of, the loaned property in transit to or from and while at The Athenaeum.
- B.12. The loan agreement will stipulate who is responsible for packing and shipping costs, and the manner of such packing and shipping.
- B.13. Each item should be accompanied by an outgoing condition report from the lender that will be updated by The Athenaeum upon receipt of the object(s) and upon return to the lender.
- B.14. The Athenaeum will give the same or higher standard of care to loaned object(s) as that given to items in its permanent collection.
- B.15. The Athenaeum will notify the lender immediately of loss or of any damage to the object(s).

C. Standards for Outgoing Loans.

C.1. Requests for loans from The Athenaeum's collections will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- C.1.a) The object(s) is not judged to be too fragile to withstand the associated handling, shipping and changes in climate.
- C.1.b) Conditions during the loan period will not endanger the object(s).
- C.1.c) The object(s) is not needed during the requested loan period.

C.2. Requests to borrow items from The Athenaeum's collections must be made in writing with reasonable notice prior to the scheduled pickup or shipment date.

C.3. The Athenaeum reserves the right to charge fees to the borrower to cover any or all of the costs associated with the loan, including but not limited to those for research, handling, conservation, photography, condition reporting, packing, shipping and insurance.

- C.4. The Executive Director reserves the right to refuse the loan of any object(s) deemed too fragile, rare, important or valuable.
- C.5. The Executive Director reserves the right to refuse the loan of any object(s) that are being used in an exhibition or that are the subject of ongoing research.
- C.6. While every effort will be made to accommodate reasonable requests, the Executive Director reserves the right to deny loan requests without explanation. In instances of problematic loans, the loan request will be referred to the Executive Committee.
- C.7. The Athenaeum will execute an Outgoing Loan Form with the borrowing institution that includes a complete inventory of object(s) being borrowed along with their insurance values.
- C.8. The borrowing institution may be required to provide a Standard Facilities Report indicating satisfactory environmental conditions and safety and security provisions in facilities where the borrowed objects will be received, stored, unpacked, prepared for exhibit, exhibited, repacked and held prior to return.
- C.9. The borrower must provide a certificate of insurance with The Athenaeum named as additional insured with all risk, wall-to-wall coverage sufficient for the valuation provided by The Athenaeum on the loan contract.
- C.10. All object(s) being shipped to a borrower will be clearly marked and accompanied by outgoing condition reports and scans or photographs.
- C.11. The Athenaeum will notify the borrower when the loan has been shipped, identifying the carrier and giving the expected delivery date.
- C.12. The borrower will be expected to maintain the same standards of care and handling as those maintained by The Athenaeum.
- C.13. The borrower will notify The Athenaeum of any evidence of damage at the time of receipt of the loan or while the object(s) are in the borrower's custody.
- C.14. The borrower will make no attempt to clean, repair or restore objects on loan from The Athenaeum unless with express permission from The Athenaeum's Executive Director.
- C.15. Shipping of objects will be by a carrier approved by The Athenaeum.
- C.16. The Athenaeum will be credited in all exhibit labeling of borrowed items. Permission for any images of the items to be used in catalogs, labels and publicity for the exhibit must be obtained in writing.
- C.17. Borrowed items are not to be removed from their frames or mounts for the purpose of photography or for any other reason.
- C.18. All borrowed objects are to be returned in the same condition and packed in the same or similar manner as when they left The Athenaeum. They are to be returned by the same or similar carrier, as approved by The Athenaeum.

## **XXVII. Deposits.**

A. In general, The Athenaeum does not accept materials for deposit. In extremely rare cases, upon the recommendation of the curatorial staff, the Executive Director and the Collections Committee, a deposit may be considered by the Board of Directors.

B. Rules governing deposits:

B.1. Deposits will be considered only from parties with full, demonstrable and uncontested rights to the deposit collection.

B.2. Deposit agreements shall be signed by both the Executive Director and the depositor.

B.3. Deposit agreements shall be reviewed by the Collections Committee and the Board of Directors every five years.

B.4. Deposit agreements may be renewed or terminated at the discretion of the Board of Directors every five years.

C. It is the burden of the depositor (and their heirs) to provide up-to-date contact information to The Athenaeum in order to facilitate the review and or return of deposits.

NOTE: This policy supersedes and replaces any previous collections management policy adopted by The Athenaeum.