



Mendocino County Museum Collections Policy

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Mission Statement

Mendocino County Museum is dedicated to preserving and interpreting its museum collections for the purpose of educating and inspiring awareness of the peoples, communities, and history of Mendocino County for the enjoyment and benefit of County residents and visitors.

Introduction

The Mendocino County Museum Collections Policy is intended to identify what items are collected by the Museum, identify the professional museum management standards used to care for the collection, and to identify respective roles and responsibilities of staff in regard to the care and management of the Museum's collections. The Museum's collections are held and maintained for the purpose of public exhibition, education, and research in furtherance of public service.

History

Mendocino County Museum has been operated and funded by the County of Mendocino since 1972. Today, the Museum functions under the Cultural Services Agency, and is funded through the Mendocino County general fund adopted annually by the Board of Supervisors. Programs, supplies, facilities, staffing, and special projects are budgeted accordingly.

The Museum originated with the Mendocino County Historical Society in the 1960s when they started fundraising to build a museum facility. In 1968, the Mendocino County Historical Society chose the 400 E. Commercial Street site in Willits because the City of Willits offered a \$1.00 year for 99 years lease on what was then three acres. This site was planned as the primary entrance to Willits from a proposed freeway bypass at that time. (The bypass that was ultimately completed in 2016, however, chose a different route.)

In 1969, the Mendocino County Historical Society began the process of requesting the County of Mendocino operate and maintain the museum. During 1970, Mendocino County's Board of Supervisors approved a motion of intent to operate the new museum and construction of the building started. In 1972 the County of Mendocino formed a Museum Department, and the Mendocino County Museum officially opened to the public. In 1973, a formal transfer agreement between the Mendocino County Historical Society and the Board of Supervisors was signed.

Expansion of the original building began in 2000. Major funding for building expansion was a joint effort between Roots of Motive Power, a local nonprofit group dedicated to

preserving and restoring logging and railroad equipment, and the Mendocino County Museum.

Roots of Motive Power originated in 1982 from a predecessor organization called Little Lake Valley Pioneer Engine Association. Roots started out with a single piece of logging equipment and with the mission of preserving and restoring whatever antique logging and railroad equipment they could locate. As donations began to come in, space was provided for display next to the Mendocino County Museum. But it soon became clear that additional space was needed to house the growing collection.

In the mid-1980s Mendocino County Museum and Roots of Motive Power created the Redwood Empire Railroad History Project with the intent of obtaining grants to expand the Museum facilities for the purpose of displaying and interpreting railroad related artifacts and history.

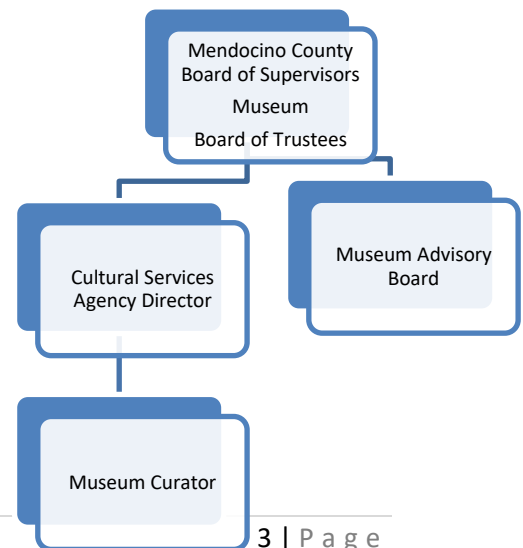
The Museum and Roots and Motive Power applied and received major funding from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), Transportation Equity Act of 1998 (TEA 21 funds) administered by the California Department of Transportation; the United States Forest Service Northwest Economic Adjustment Initiative (Option 9), and from the County of Mendocino.

In 2002 and 2003 an additional 23,000 square feet of space was constructed to expand the original Museum building. The additions were an annex on the north side of the original building for Artifact Storage and Conservation Laboratory space. In addition, the Museum expanded on the east side increasing the complex to 34,000 square feet. This expansion included the following additional features: “Engine House” section, two Mendocino College classrooms, Museum conference room called the “Wonacott Room,” and the Roots of Motive Power Office and Research Library.

Scope of Authority

The Board of Supervisors of Mendocino County serves as the Mendocino County Museum’s Board of Trustees.

The Museum is operated under the Cultural Services Agency (CSA), and thereby the Cultural Services Agency Director. The CSA Director assigns authority to the Museum Curator for the management and care of the Museum’s collection. Through processes outlined in this policy, both the CSA Director and Museum Curator have authority on new acquisitions and the deaccessioning process. To ensure public trust and transparency, new



acquisitions and deaccessioning shall be reported to the Museum Advisory Board during regularly held meetings.

The Museum Advisory Board was established in 1970 through an agreement between the County of Mendocino and the Mendocino County Historical Society. The Museum Advisory Board functions have been modified by amendments and Board resolution over the years.

The purpose of the Museum Advisory Board is to provide direction and support for the preservation of the Mendocino County Museum. The Museum Advisory Board advises the Cultural Services Agency Director and the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors who act as the Museum's Board of Trustees. Each Board of Supervisor appoints an advisor from either within or outside his or her district with terms to coincide with the term of that Supervisor. In addition, organizational representatives from the City of Willits, Mendocino College, Mendocino County Historical Society, and Roots of Motive Power are appointed by submitting their nominees to the Board of Supervisors for appointment. Appointments for organizational representatives are four years with the terms of the City of Willits and Mendocino College ending in even numbered years and the terms of the Mendocino County Historical Society and Roots of Motive Power ending in odd numbered years. For detailed membership, terms, officers, and meetings please see the Museum Advisory Bylaws.

Scope of the Collections

Mendocino County Museum has Permanent or Accessioned Collections and Use or Non-Accessioned Collections:

Permanent or Accessioned Collections: These collections represent the most rare and historically significant artifacts and information about Mendocino County. The objects within this collection are considered valuable and irreplaceable and are subject to strict accountability and the highest level of care.

Historical Objects Collection

Non-living artifacts, artwork, and objects that relate directly to the Mission Statement of the Mendocino County Museum. The accessioned collection will not include items that are unable to be stored and cared for within the Mendocino County Museum interior museum storage facility.

Archival Collection

Documents and photographs related to the history and people of Mendocino County. The Archives consist of mostly paper-based manuscripts, printed materials, maps, records, photographs, ledgers, etc.

Use or Non-Accessioned Collections: These collections are primarily used for education and may be handled by the public. Items in these collections are not subject to the restrictions and standard of care afforded the Permanent or Accessioned Collections.

Education Collection

Items in this collection are not part of the Permanent or Accessioned Collections although records of their receipt and disposition will be maintained with an inventory. These items will be used solely for education and public programs. Items in this collection are not subject to the restrictions and standard of care afforded to the accessioned collection. Objects within this collection are composed of donated items directed to this collection with the donor's approval or through deaccession and transfer from the Historical Objects or Archival Collections outlined formally in this policy. Objects or materials in the Education Collection are considered expendable within the context of educational programs of the Museum. These objects or materials may be utilized with minimal supervision in program related activities or initiatives. When the object or material no longer has program value or has deteriorated beyond use, these items may be disposed of by noting its removal on the inventory record, no other formal action is required.

Prop Collection

This collection includes materials or reproduction artifacts or items that may be purchased or donated for the specific purpose of being used as props in an exhibition or educational program setting. Any purchased items will follow Mendocino County Policy No. 1 Purchasing, Leasing, and Contracting Policy. Props are not accessioned or inventoried and their continued use is determined by an active or future need in a program or exhibit setting. If not in active use, these materials are disposed of following Mendocino County Policy No. 1 regulations or stored outside of the collection storage areas.

Permanent or Accessioned Collections Acquisition

Mendocino County Museum defines artifact or archival acquisitions as the formal process used to legally accept and to record an object as an item within the Museum's Permanent or Accessioned Collections or more specifically its Historical Object and Archival Collections. Permanent or Accessioned Collections receive the highest level of

care. Upon being accepted into the Permanent or Accessioned Collections, the item is given an immediate and permanent record using a control number or unique identifier for the artifact/item added to the collection from the same source at the same time, and for which the Mendocino County Museum accepts custody right, or title. Mendocino County Museum acquires historical objects and archival material for the Permanent or Accessioned Collections through one of the following ways: donation, bequest, or transfer.

Mendocino County Museum staff determines when the Museum will accept and not accept a donation, bequest, or transfer. Each potential donation, bequest, or transfer must go through a formal application process. Potential donors must complete a Potential Donation Application Form, as well as provide photographs of the potential donation for staff to use in evaluating the items condition.

The Museum Curator and Cultural Services Agency Director reviews Potential Donation Application Forms using the Acquisition Qualifications Rubric. Subsequent to meeting the minimum qualification score and approval, the Museum Curator will write a formal acceptance letter informing the donor, and begin the Deed of Gift process which legally transfers ownership of the donated item to the Mendocino County Museum.

Appraisals, if desired by donors, shall be obtained by the donor or the donor's authorized representative from outside sources prior to making a donation. Mendocino County Museum staff, volunteers, or contracted staff will not appraise artifacts to be donated.

Mendocino County Museum will use the following prerequisites in determining acceptance of potential donations:

1. The item supports and is consistent with the mission statement of the Mendocino County Museum.
2. The item abides by the strict adherence to the laws governing acquisition, with a valid title and documentation of ownership. No acquisition with questionable background will be accepted without legal proof of how it was obtained.
3. Acquisition is consistent with all applicable state, national, or international laws or conventions protecting the rights of artists, cultural patrimony etc.
4. Mendocino County Museum is able to provide indoor storage space, protect, and preserve the item/artifact under the conditions that assure its availability for Museum purposes and are kept with professionally acceptable standards.
5. The cost and expenditure of staff time and other resources in acquiring, researching, transporting, processing, moving, and storing the item must fit within the Museum's available resources.

6. The item must be of an appropriate size, weight, and physical state for which the Museum can provide adequate storage space and security.
7. The acquisition allows free and clear title and without restrictions from the donor.
8. The item does not unnecessarily duplicate an item already in the collection.
9. The item is in good condition, without the need of conservation.
10. The item is intended to become a part of the collection for as long as it remains useful for the purposes of the museum.

Strict Adherence to the Laws Governing of Acquisition

Archaeological, ethnographic, or biotic objects will be acquired only when they have been collected, possessed, and exported and/or imported in full compliance with the laws and regulations of the country or countries of origin, of the Federal Government of the United States, and of the individual states within the United States. The Mendocino County Museum will refuse to acquire objects in any case where it has cause to believe that the circumstances of their collection involved the recent unscientific or intentional destruction of sites or monuments, or where state or federal laws or international treaties have been violated.

These standards will be taken into account in determining whether to accept loans for exhibition or other purposes. Reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that these conditions are met, that title to the object or objects may properly be transferred to the Mendocino County Museum and that the Mendocino County Museum stays up-to-date on the changing laws and regulations concerning object collecting, ownership, and movement across geo-political boundaries. The Mendocino County Museum will cooperate with authorities of the United States and other countries in legal action against those committing improprieties. Copies of permits and correspondence related to the acquisition of collections shall be kept in the archives of the collection holding them.

In an attempt to avoid encouraging, even indirectly, trade in illicit or irresponsibly recovered objects, the Mendocino County Museum will not authenticate or appraise any object. In addition, if the Mendocino County Museum should inadvertently acquire an object that is later determined to have been exported or recovered in violation of the Mendocino County Museum's acquisition policy, the Museum will promptly return the object to the owner or transfer agent, or to the government of the country of origin, or to another appropriate recipient.

Found in Collections and Abandoned Property

Items that are in the Mendocino County Museum's possession that are not supported by any documentation or sufficient evidence to prove Museum ownership will be documented by the Museum Curator to determine the items status in order to gain a clear title through review of Museum records. Items shall also be evaluated in consultation with counsel, for any change in legal status under Civil Code sections 1899 - 1899.11 ("Loans to Museums for Indefinite or Long Terms") or as unclaimed property. If the item is deemed to be a hazard to the collection, a hazard to health and safety of the public, or a hazard to health and safety of the museum staff who care for it, it may be disposed of immediately as outlined in California Civil Code 1899.6. (a).

Deaccessioning

Once an object has been accessioned into the Mendocino County Museum's Historical Object or Archival Collections, it can only be removed through completion of the deaccessioning process. Mendocino County Museum exercises careful deliberation with caution before deaccessioning. Deaccessioning shall be considered when one or more of the following conditions exist and a Deaccessioning Form is completed by the Cultural Services Agency Director and the Mendocino County Museum Curator. In addition the deaccessioned object(s) will be reported to the Museum Advisory Board.

Mendocino County Museum uses one or more of the following criteria in determining deaccessioning:

1. The artifact is not relevant to or consistent with Mendocino County Museum's mission.
2. The artifact is deemed to be an unnecessary duplicate of others in the collection.
3. The artifact cannot be adequately stored or cared for in a professional manner.
4. The artifact no longer retains its physical integrity, its identity cannot be determined, or its authenticity is in question.

Disposal

After the formal process of deaccessioning, any object removed from the collection will be disposed of by: transferring the item to a museum or an appropriate institution, transferring the item to the Museum's Education Collection, or if no other alternative exists by destruction. All dispositions will be documented using the Final Record of Disposition Form.

Loan Agreements and Policies

Upon the approval of the Mendocino County Museum Curator and Cultural Services Agency Director, artifacts in the Mendocino County Museum Collection may be loaned to other museums, government agencies, or other institutions on a case by case basis for a period of time not to exceed one (1) year. Mendocino County Museum does not allow loans to private individuals. Loans may be renewed after one (1) year. Requests for outgoing loans must be made in writing and approved with a signed Loan Agreement by the Mendocino County Museum Curator and Cultural Services Agency Director.

Incoming Loans (Borrowing)

Upon the approval of the Mendocino County Museum Curator and Cultural Services Agency Director, the Museum may initiate the loan of objects on a temporary short term basis for the purposes of exhibiting purposes only. All items accepted for loan by the Mendocino County Museum shall be covered by an incoming Loan Agreement Form which specifies the terms, use and dates of the loan. In addition, proof of ownership and the manner in which an item was collected or acquired may be required.

Standards of Care

Mendocino County Museum staff and volunteers are responsible for the care of the Museum's collections in trust and service to the public. All materials shall be tracked as they enter or leave Mendocino County Museum, with care taken to ensure safe handling and accurate documentation. Mendocino County Museum shall ensure the proper maintenance of buildings and grounds to minimize the risk to the collections so that they are preserved for future generations. Mendocino County Museum proactively works to identify risks that could potentially harm people and the collections, and appropriate allocation of resources to reduce these risks. Collection related decisions are determined by the Mendocino County Museum Curator and the Cultural Services Agency Director following the policies outlined in this document.

Mendocino County Museum staff will inform volunteers, researchers, consultants, vendors, and contracted staff about the shared responsibilities in collection care policies, procedures and guidelines.

Collections Documentation

All objects in Mendocino County Museum's Permanent or Accessioned Collections are recorded into the Museum's collection management database system and assigned a collection number, and either an exhibit, or storage location. If an object is moved from an exhibit or to storage the database will be updated to reflect the new location.

Environment and Storage

Mendocino County Museum endeavors to regularly monitor environmental conditions and takes proactive measures to mitigate the effects of ultraviolet light, fluctuations in temperature and humidity, air pollution, damage, pests and natural disasters to its collections.

Conservation

All objects in Mendocino County Museum's collections are subject to the same standards of professional care. Conservation action may be undertaken only by trained, professional conservators, and any treatment must respect the integrity of the object. Conservation treatment of the fabric of an object must include earlier repairs and modifications which, after examination and research, are found to be historically significant. Any new material added to the object must be minimal and must be compatible with the future welfare of the object. No action may be taken without a thorough technical examination of the object and a written proposal of treatment listing all possible treatment options. Once treatment is undertaken, the conservator must provide a written report of all conservation actions which will be maintained in the object's Accession File and made available to researchers and scholars upon request.

Public Access and Use of the Collections

Research requests from the public to view non-exhibited artifacts, archival materials, or reference materials require completing a Research Request Form and must be approved by the Mendocino County Museum Curator prior to setting an appointment. All research requests will take place during normal operating hours of the Mendocino County Museum.

Mendocino County Museum will provide reasonable access to its collection for legitimate research and study by responsible investigators, subject to procedures necessary to safeguard the objects and to restrictions imposed by limitations of space and facilities, exhibition requirements, and availability of curatorial staff. The Museum Curator will advise the researcher to the proper use and handling of collections and will exercise caution when determining the level of access to the collections, especially when the safety of an object appears to be jeopardized. Appropriate training will be provided for all individuals given permission to handle collections. Mendocino County Museum reserves the right to hold users liable for any damage they cause to collections.