

# STAR OF THE REPUBLIC COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

## *PART I: COLLECTIONS POLICY*

(Adopted by The Blinn College Administration 2008)

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Origin*

The Star of the Republic Museum is located within the 293.1-acre Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historical Park in Washington County, Texas. Administered today by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), the Park was originally acquired by the State of Texas in 1915 and transferred to the State Parks Board in 1949. In 1969, the Regular Session of the Sixty-First Legislature of the United States House of Representatives approved House Bill No. 634 transferring control and custody of the “Washington-on-the-Brazos Museum Building” and its contents to Blinn College, Washington County, Texas, effective September 1, 1969. The Museum opened to the public on March 2, 1970 and was accredited by the American Association of Museums in 1972.

#### *Mission*

The Museum’s mission statement, adopted by the Blinn College Board of Trustees in 2007, states:

*The Star of the Republic Museum was created by the Texas Legislature and is administered by Blinn College as a cultural and educational institution. Its purpose is to collect and preserve the material culture of the Texas Republic (1836-1846) and to interpret the history, cultures, diversity, and values of early Texans. The Museum strives to inspire interest, understanding and appreciation of Texas heritage for students, teachers, scholars, and the general public through exhibits, tours, programs, web activities, and outreach.*

#### *Audience*

Each year, approximately 10,000 of the Museum’s 30,000-35,000 visitors are school children. These children mostly represent 4<sup>th</sup> graders and 7<sup>th</sup> graders who are required to study Texas history. The remainder is a combination of tourists, senior citizens, scholars, college students, and the general public. Though the Museum’s focus—the Texas Republic (1836-1846)—is quite narrow, it attracts both out-of-state visitors and international visitors.

## *Collections*

**HISTORY.** The collections, not including the archaeological collection, currently number just under 8,000 items. Within five years of the Museum's opening, 55% of the collections had been acquired and, within 10 years, 75% had been acquired.

**SCOPE.** Using Chenhall's nomenclature, 58% of the collection has been classified as Communication Artifacts, 11% as Tools & Equipment for Materials, 9% as Tools & Equipment for Science and Technology, 7% as Personal Artifacts, and 5% as Furnishings. The remaining 10% encompass a variety of categories. Included in the collection is everything from ceramics and glass to clothing and furniture with documents representing over half of the collection.

**NUMBER AND STATUS.** To date, all of the collection has been accessioned, cataloged, and automated. All of the objects and many of the documents have been digitized. However, as with any database system, the electronic files require constant vigilance and reconciliation.

The Collections Management Policy governs the manner in which portable cultural materials are managed while in the custody of the Museum. This Policy does not govern treatment or care of the Museum's building fabric.

### **1. STATEMENT OF MUSEUM'S PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION OF COLLECTIONS**

- 1.1. Guiding documents. In the course of determining and implementing policies and procedures respecting the Museum collection, the philosophy and actions of the Museum, its employees, and Agents, shall be guided by the following documents:
  - 1.1.1. The Blinn College Board Policy Manual
  - 1.1.2. The Star of the Republic Museum's Mission Statement.
  - 1.1.3. The Star of the Republic Museum's Institutional Plan.
  - 1.1.4. The Star of the Republic Museum's Code of Ethics.
- 1.2. Organizational structure.
  - 1.2.1. The Museum's Board of Trustees is responsible for all matters respecting the Museum collection and loaned materials. They shall delegate this responsibility to the Director of the Museum, who may further delegate responsibility to professional curatorial staff.
- 1.3. Scope and uses of the Museum's collections.
  - 1.3.1. The immediate goals of the Museum with respect to the collection are to conserve, document, and present collections in accordance with the Museum's Mission Statement and this Collections Policy.
  - 1.3.2. Permanent Collection. The Museum shall have a Permanent Collection that shall include objects used for the purpose of interpreting significant aspects of the Texas Republic period. The principle emphasis in collecting and exhibition shall be the years 1836-1846.

- 1.3.3. Archival Collection. The Museum shall have an archival collection of primary original materials including, but not limited to: legal documents, photographs, plans and drawings, maps, books, journals and diaries, letters, etc
- 1.3.4. Education Collection. The Museum shall have an Education Collection comprised of objects used for educational purposes. These objects may be furnishings or props of unsuitable physical condition for the Primary Collection. They may be useful in telling a story of the Republic period in the Showers-Brown Discovery Center or temporary exhibits. Duplicates of items already in another collection may be assigned to the Education Collection. Items from the Education Collection may be handled or used by visitors under the supervision of museum staff.
- 1.3.5. Library Collection. The Museum shall have a non-circulating research library to assist the staff in interpreting the Texas Republic period and that will be open to the Public.

## **2. MANAGEMENT STAFFING AND COMMITTEES**

- 2.1. A Collections Committee shall be established to oversee acquisitions and deaccessions. Membership of the Committee shall include the Director, Curator of Collections and Exhibits, and Curator of Education. The Committee shall, as necessary from time to time, seek advice and expertise from a pool of advisors.
- 2.2. The Museum shall maintain current job descriptions for all persons working with collections. Generally, the following general responsibilities shall apply:
  - 2.2.1. The Director is responsible to the Blinn College Administration for all aspects of Collections Management.
  - 2.2.2. Reporting to the Director, the Curator of Collections and Exhibits creates collecting and exhibition plans. The Curator recommends acquisitions to the Collections Committee and finalizes transactions. The Curator recommends deaccessions to the Collections Committee. The Curator oversees and implements collections management procedures.

## **3. ACQUISITIONS**

- 3.1. The Collections Committee shall approve acquisitions.
  - 3.1.1. Committee decisions regarding acquisitions shall generally be based on a majority vote, but the Director shall have veto authority over any vote.
- 3.2. Acquisitions may be made by:
  - 3.2.1. Purchase;
  - 3.2.2. Gift – outright or fractional;
  - 3.2.3. Bequest;
  - 3.2.4. Exchange;
  - 3.2.5. any other manner of transaction by which title to the object passes to the Museum.
- 3.3. In considering objects for acquisition, the Committee shall establish that the proposed acquisition(s):
  - 3.3.1. support the Museum’s goal to interpret the Texas Republic period and tell the subsequent stories;

- 3.3.2. is in lawful possession of the donor or vendor, and that unrestricted title can be obtained (objects with restrictions or conditions made by the source can be accepted only with the written approval of the Director);
  - 3.3.3. the proposed acquisition's long-term maintenance, storage, and/or required treatment does not pose an unreasonable financial burden on the Museum;
  - 3.3.4. if a duplicate, serves a useful purpose in exhibitions or programming;
  - 3.3.5. presence in the Museum does not imperil the building or other objects in the collection.
- 3.4. Accessions. The Museum shall maintain consistent accession procedures that generally comply with procedures recommended by the Texas Association of Museums and the American Association of Museums.

#### 4. DEACCESSIONS

- 4.1. Criteria for deaccessions. If an object in the permanent collection is duplicated, in unsuitable condition, or considered no longer relevant to the Museum's purpose, it may be deaccessioned.
- 4.2. Process. Decisions to deaccession shall be made solely by the Board of Trustees or their designees on the advice of the Curator and Collections Committee.
- 4.3. Acceptable methods of disposal. Objects may be disposed of by the Director who shall consider the following methods in order of precedence:
- 4.3.1. transfer to the Education collection;
  - 4.3.2. transfer to the general assets of the Museum;
  - 4.3.3. gift, sale or trade to the State of Texas, municipal government, or a cultural institution which is a registered charity;
  - 4.3.4. trade or sale to a foreign cultural institution provided the transfer not forbidden by federal or state law and, if required, is approved by the Director;
  - 4.3.5. public auction;
  - 4.3.6. destruction.
- 4.4. Use of Proceeds from Deaccessions. Revenue derived from deaccessions shall only be used for the purchase or direct care of collections such as conservation, preservation, supplies or equipment, etc.

#### 5. LOANS

- 5.1. Outgoing Loans
- 5.1.1. Loans shall normally be made to institutions with purposes similar to those of the Museum, and shall in no circumstance be made to individuals.
  - 5.1.2. In considering loan requests, the Curator shall ascertain that the object(s) requested are in a physical condition suitable for travel and that environmental considerations at the borrowing institution are, at a minimum, similar to conditions at the Star of the Republic.
  - 5.1.3. Borrowing institutions shall be responsible for insuring objects loaned by the Museum while they are off Museum property.
  - 5.1.4. All outgoing loans must be approved in writing by the Director.
- 5.2. Incoming loans. The Museum shall generally accept loaned items only for temporary short-term exhibitions. Objects accepted for short-term loan must be appropriate to the

theme of the temporary exhibit. Loaned objects must be in acceptable condition and require no restoration prior to display. In rare cases, the Museum may accept long-term loans. Objects accepted for long-term loans must be of exceptional value in interpreting a story of the Texas Republic. Long-term loans must also be of a nature that, should the object(s) ever become available for permanent acquisition, the Museum might reasonably attempt to acquire it/them. Long-term loans must also be in acceptable condition and require no restoration prior to display.

## **6. OBJECTS PLACED IN THE CUSTODY OF THE MUSEUM**

- 6.1. Purpose of deposit. The Museum may receive objects onto the Museum premises for the following reasons:
  - 6.1.1. consideration for acquisition through gift;
  - 6.1.2. transfer from another institution;
  - 6.1.3. loan;
  - 6.1.4. identification;
  - 6.1.5. study.
- 6.2. Authorization criteria. The Director and Curator of Collections shall be authorized to accept items into the museum for the purposes laid out in 6.1 (above).
- 6.3. Registration procedures. Museum staff shall implement procedures ensuring that all critical information related to an object's source, value, and date of deposit are easily accessible and kept in perpetuity.
- 6.4. Review schedule. Museum staff shall implement procedures that ensure potential donors and vendors are dealt with in a timely manner.

## **7. CARE OF THE COLLECTIONS**

- 7.1. Responsibility of staff to collection.
  - 7.1.1. General. All staff members shall be made aware of the basic physical needs of the collection. Curatorial staff shall have an advanced level of knowledge respecting the physical needs of the collection. All staff shall be vigilant in monitoring of physical conditions or situations that imperil collections.
  - 7.1.2. Handling. Only those staff members authorized by the Curator shall be permitted to handle artifacts.
  - 7.1.3. Emergency procedures. Curatorial staff shall develop a written Plan outlining procedures to be followed in the event of fire, flood, earthquake, or any other reasonably foreseen critical event which would imperil the collection. Where possible, this Plan shall be integrated with the Museum's broader Emergency Preparedness Plan.
- 7.2. Environmental monitoring and control requirements. Museum staff shall use scientific instruments to monitor the environment in exhibit and collection storage areas. Readings of ultra-violet and visible light levels in these areas shall be taken periodically. Readings of relative humidity levels in these areas shall be taken periodically and over longer terms, depending on equipment availability. Curatorial staff shall plan strategies to control harmful light levels and fluctuations in relative humidity using techniques which do not unduly impair the aesthetic experience of Museum visitors.

- 7.3. Packing and shipping responsibilities. Curatorial staff shall be responsible for the packing and shipping of outbound and incoming collection objects. On occasion (especially in out-of-town scenarios), it is necessary for vendors and donors to pack and ship without direct supervision from the Curatorial department. In these circumstances, Curatorial staff shall endeavor to ensure that suitable packing and shipping methods are implemented.
- 7.4. Procedures for movement within the Museum. Normally, only Curatorial staff shall move objects. Exceptions may occur in the course of routine facility use or programming activities when other designated staff members may move objects and in cases of emergency when anyone may move objects under the direction of staff. When objects are moved on a semi-permanent (i.e. for a temporary exhibit) or permanent basis, the Curator shall record the move and keep a permanent record of it.
- 7.5. Storage. The Museum shall endeavor to provide secure and safe storage areas for objects not on display. Where circumstances such as building design features, lack of space, and/or limited funding prevents the creation and maintenance of ideal storage conditions, Curatorial staff shall be diligent and creative in their effort to facilitate physical access to collections and mitigate risk.
- 7.6. Inventories
  - 7.6.1. The Curator of Collections shall establish methods and procedures for taking inventory of collections.
  - 7.6.2. The Curator of Collections shall conduct periodic inventories of portions of the collection on a pre-arranged schedule to ensure that each object is accounted for at least once every five years.
    - 7.6.2.1. Twice every twelve months, the Curator of Collections shall be directed to conduct spot-check inventories of a display or storage room, or portion thereof.
  - 7.6.3. Procedures shall be developed to govern actions taken in the event collections material is discovered missing. When a loss is confirmed, the Curator of Collections shall report the loss in writing to the Director.

## **8. RECORDS**

- 8.1. Staff responsibility.
  - 8.1.1. The creation, maintenance, and provision of access to collections information and documentation are important staff responsibilities.
  - 8.1.2. Staff members working outside the Curatorial department shall be briefed on circumstances where their activities may impact on collections records, and be advised of the best practices to follow.
- 8.2. Record categories.
  - 8.2.1. Collections record categories shall generally follow the recommendations of the American Association of State and Local History and the American Association of Museums.
  - 8.2.2. Curatorial staff shall be mindful of changing information technology, and create record categories and methodologies most likely to be transferable to and accessible by electronic networks.
  - 8.2.3. Collection record categories shall be described in the Collections Procedures Manual.

8.3. Handling and storage of records.

8.3.1. Collections records shall be handled with due care and attention at all times. Once in the custody and control of the Curatorial Department, collections documents shall be handled in a manner that mitigates damage and ensures longevity.

8.3.2. Collections records shall be stored in conditions that mitigate damage and ensure longevity. In the case of electronic records, procedures shall be implemented to ensure the timely migration of collections information to new data storage technologies.

## 9. SECURITY

9.1. Protection of collection from theft and vandalism, and fire.

9.1.1. The Museum shall safeguard the collection from theft and vandalism through a variety of means, including, but not limited to, the following:

9.1.1.1. an electronic intrusion and fire alarm system monitored 24 hours per day by an alarm company monitoring station approved by the Museum's insurance company; the Director shall ensure that the alarm company's monitoring station has an up-to-date prioritized list of all employees required to respond to an alarm call-out.

9.1.1.2. an electronic intrusion alarm system with enunciating capability monitored by Museum staff during times the Museum is occupied; except in rare cases, and at the discretion of management on a case-by-case basis, the enunciating alarm system shall be armed whenever people other than the Museum's paid employees occupy the building.

9.1.1.3. training staff members and volunteers how to respond to security concerns and providing them with the necessary tools

9.1.1.4. maintenance of a current list of rules and regulations applying to museum visitors.

9.2. Written procedures for dealing with losses.

9.2.1. The Museum shall have written procedures describing the process to be followed in the event artifacts are lost or stolen.

9.3. Protection of records.

9.3.1. Collections records shall be protected from loss and unauthorized access.

9.3.2. Manual collections records shall, where possible, be produced on acid-free papers and stored in acid-free file folders and envelopes in locking fire-resistant cabinets in a locked room.

9.3.3. In situations where electronic and manual collections records are made available to the public, access to confidential information (e.g. value) shall be restricted.

## 10. RISK MANAGEMENT

10.1. Insurance

10.1.1. Role of Insurance. The Museum shall endeavor at all times to reduce the risk of loss and damage to objects. The role of insurance is to remedy loss or damage to collections and loans. The existence of insurance should not be used to justify weak stewardship of objects owned by the Museum and others.

- 10.1.2. Insured value. The Museum shall insure the collection to its estimated fair market value. Insurance of the collection at a partial level of its fair market value can be permitted only by the Board of Trustees and after their amendment to this clause of the Collections Management Policy.
- 10.1.3. Insurance and outgoing loans. All outgoing loans shall be insured at the expense of the borrowing institution. The Curator shall estimate fair market values of outgoing loans before the object(s) leave the Museum.
- 10.1.4. Insurance and incoming loans. The Museum shall insure all incoming loans. The Curator shall review the values assigned by lenders. In cases where the Curator is uncertain of values or is not in agreement with values assigned by a lender, an impartial professional appraisal shall be obtained.
- 10.1.5. Insurance and temporary deposits. The Museum shall insure all temporary deposits.
- 10.1.6. Insurance records. The Museum shall store the collections insurance policy documents in a fire-resistant safe. Documentation related to claims shall be stored in the document files of the relevant objects.
- 10.1.7. Insurance deviations. The Director has the authority to deviate from this policy respecting collections insurance provided the Board of Trustees is advised in a timely manner. The Director does not have authority to deviate from the requirements described in 10.1.2.
- 10.1.8. The Curator's assigned value for insurance purposes shall be known as "fair market value" as defined by the American Association of Museums. The Curator shall verify with the Museum's insurer that this definition meets their standard for claim remedies.
- 10.1.9. The Curator may update values assigned to individual objects whenever she/he becomes aware of a recent sale of a similar item in which the sale price varied significantly from the current assigned value. No update shall be made if the Curator believes the sale in question represents an anomaly, which is best ignored.
- 10.2. Integrated Pest Management. All staff shall report to the Curator any incident causing damage to an artifact by a person or other pest including (but not limited to) mold, mildew, insects, birds or mammals. Curatorial staff shall carefully inspect all incoming objects for evidence of pest infestation. When pests are discovered, the infested object(s) shall immediately be isolated and action taken to either eliminate the pests or permanently remove the object(s) from the museum premises.
- 10.3. Written procedures for emergencies and disturbances.
  - 10.3.1. The Museum shall have written procedures describing what actions are to be taken to safeguard the collections in the event of emergency and civil disturbance.

## **11. ACCESS TO THE COLLECTIONS**

- 11.1. Access to collections and related information by visitors and researchers is of special importance to the Museum. The Museum and its staff shall endeavor to provide cheerful and helpful access to objects and their documentation.
  - 11.1.1. In the provision of access to collections, the Curator of Collections shall ensure that access does not unreasonably imperil the physical safety of the object or objects.

11.1.2. The Curator of Collections shall make special effort to personally assist individuals interested in obtaining information on the collection, and shall use these opportunities to gather and store new information about collection materials from visitors and researchers who may have new information and/or specialized knowledge.

**12. COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT MANUAL**

- 12.1. The Museum shall prepare a Collections Management Procedures Manual describing procedures to be followed so that collections are managed in a consistent manner in perpetuity, and in accordance with normally accepted museum standards. The Manual shall also include sample forms for various actions.
- 12.2. The Collections Management Manual shall be reviewed annually and updated as required.