

MDHS Collection Policy 2020

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Introduction

The beginnings of the Moruya and District Historical Society (MDHS) date from a meeting in 1970 in the Zanadvoroff home in Broulee to hear a noted ornithologist and historian, Alec Chisolm, give a lecture on local birdlife. He suggested during the meeting that this district, given its rich colonial history, should have a Historical Society.

Harry Louttit and Frank Finlayson (the editor of the Moruya Examiner) took up his idea and following a public meeting in the CWA Hall, an inaugural meeting was held on 14 June 1970 and the Eurobodalla Shire Historical Society was formed. Subsequently it was renamed the Moruya and District Historical Society.

The Society was first housed in a leased property in Queen Street. With the aid of loans from members, the Emmott House was purchased on 17 April 1976 and the beginnings of the Society's collection date from around that time. Emmott House is now the MDHS Museum and the surrounding buildings house the Genealogical Management Committee and its extensive library, a collection of objects relevant to the economic and geographic development of the district and storage. There is also a covered shed on land leased from the Council which houses a granite lathe and associated machinery used in the granite quarries near Moruya. (See site map at **Attachment D**).

This Collection Policy has been developed in line with the Society's overarching mission statement:

.....to promote the preservation of local history of Moruya and its district through active conservation, education and involvement of the local community.

1.0 Nature of the Collection

The Society aims to promote the preservation of local history through active collecting and curation, research, conservation, education and involvement of the local community. The Collection has evolved since the 1970s and its volunteers have built up a significant cultural resource related to the people, places and history of Moruya and its surrounding district. The Collection includes significant objects and photograph collections as well as archives, research files and oral histories.

This Collection Management Policy has a primary focus on collecting for exhibitions, educational purposes, research and archives. The Society also has a commitment to protection of the museum's collection through appropriate museum practice and maintaining the Society's sustainability in the longer term.

Overall responsibility for the Society's collection lies with the MDHS Management Committee chaired by the President of the Society and comprising the Vice-President, the Treasurer, the Secretary, and three nominated members. As part of its organisational structure two discrete bodies or sub-committees have been established which report to the Management Committee at its regular meetings – the Collection Management Committee which focuses on the day-to-day management and curation of the Museum and its collection, and the Genealogy Management Committee which manages the Genealogy Research Library and its extensive document collection including photographs. An organisation chart is at **Attachment A**.

In relation to the Museum Collection, the Collection Management Committee in its curatorial role, recommends and advises the MDHS Management Committee where there are key issues and decisions on acquisition, deaccessioning, preservation, loans, special exhibitions and permanent displays.

Acquisition, de-accessioning, disposal and loan decisions are the final responsibility of the MDHS Management Committee. This Committee will take into account the curatorial advice from the Collection Management Committee, but is also bound to wider considerations as expressed in the MDHS mission statement.

Similarly, the Genealogy Management Committee reports and guides on key issues affecting its operation. Both committees must refer any expenditure proposals greater than \$100 to the Treasurer through the Management Committee.

The Collection as it has evolved is largely housed in the heritage listed Emmott House and adjacent buildings. Acquisitions have focussed on objects, documents and photographs and digital images that have direct relevance to people, places and events significant or unique to Moruya and its surrounding district. There is an emphasis on items provenanced in the local district and related to people closely associated with the area at key periods in history. These general principles guide the curation and management of the collection.

The Museum only acquires Aboriginal Cultural Objects of significance to the region in circumstances where the object is provenanced and in consultation with the appropriate representatives of the relevant Aboriginal Community.

2.0 Collection Development

The following strands can be identified in the current MDHS Collection:

Historic

| Chronological Phase | Additional information |
|--|--|
| Natural History | |
| Pre 1851: Pre-European contact, mapping and colonisation | Includes Limits of Settlement, squatting, gazettal of the town of Moruya in 1851, commencement of land sales in 1852 |
| 1852-1900: Colonial Period | Arrival of timber industry, land selection, farming, mining (silver, gold and granite), growth of towns and villages |
| 1901- 1945: Federation to the end of World War II | Federation, local government, Sydney Harbour Bridge granite, depression and war |
| 1946-1980: Post war | Light industry, migration, beach culture, alternative culture movement |
| 1981 onwards; Migration to the coast | Development of coastal communities, increasing numbers of retirees and sea changers |

Thematic

The Museum has an interest in particular themes as they relate to Moruya and the surrounding district:

- The natural environment
- The built environment
- Social history
- Agriculture and industry

2.1 Acquisition

The Society may acquire objects for the Collection by donation or outright purchase. Long term loans are not accepted. However objects may be accepted on-loan for the duration of a temporary exhibition under strict loan agreements that define the terms of the Society's liability.

Acquisition, deaccessioning, disposal and loan proposals should be brought to the attention of the MDHS President in the first instance.

A guide to the necessary steps in these processes is at **Attachment B**.

In making decisions about acquisition, the MDHS Management Committee will consider proposals within the historic and thematic framework of MDHS interests and the following factors:

- Relevance (Does the object fit with MDHS collecting interests)

- Significance (refer to Section 2.3 Significance)
- Provenance¹ (availability of evidence or other documentation)
- Rarity and documentation (priority should be given to rare or excellent examples of a particular type of object)
- Condition (is further conservation required and cost implications)
- Storage and display (availability and any special requirements to ensure access and preservation)

Unsolicited offers

Unsolicited offers of objects must follow the acquisition procedure. Any object offered to the Society for inclusion into the Museum collection cannot be left at the Society premises without having a complete *Deed of Gift* form with the donor's contact details and as much relevant information on the identification of the object and the provenance as is known.

2.2 De-accessioning and Disposal

Deaccessioning refers to the formal process of removing an item or object from the collection register, catalogue or database.

Disposal is the physical removal of an object/item from the organisation.

In both cases a formal process is necessary with the final decision to be made by the MDHS Management Committee following a report from the Collection Management Committee.

There are significant sensitivities around de-accessioning and disposal faced by a small museum like the MDHS Museum. There are also practicalities to be considered such as the declining availability of suitable storage space.

2.2.1 Deaccessioning

Deaccessioning is a process that requires much tact. The general public may view deaccessioning practices as a rejection or neglect of their gifts to the community. Most people give items to a museum or gallery because they want to see them preserved for future generations, and de-accessioning is therefore a sensitive process as it can be seen as a rejection of a gift to the community.

The MDHS Collection Management Committee may consider de-accessioning from time to time for a number of reasons for example:

- lack of available storage/exhibition space
- deterioration of an object rendering its condition unsuitable or hazardous for storage or exhibition
- a request for a transfer of ownership from another institution, group or individual.

The decision on proposals to deaccession or dispose of items or objects in the collection is the sole responsibility of the MDHS Management Committee. The relevant MDHS sub-committees (ie the Collection Management Committee and the Genealogy Management Committee) shall prepare a report and associated recommendation on each proposal before any decision is made.

2.2.2 Factors to be considered in deciding de-accessioning

In making its final decision, the Management Committee may take into account broader considerations such as the support or otherwise of the wider community given that the continued sustainability of the museum is dependent on community support. Further, it is desirable that these

¹ Noting that in some cases objects may be acquired without relevant provenance to the Moruya district if it was typically used in the district or is otherwise associated with it in a unique way. This may also apply to objects which assist in the historical interpretation of a particular object or have an educational role.

processes be open and accountable, for example through the provision of suitable 'cooling off' periods and notifications in local media, so that the community is engaged and supportive.

Some key factors that should be covered in the Collection Management Committee's assessment report include:

1. Potential for negative impacts on the Society from any decision on a specific object/item
2. Financial costs associated with de-accession and disposal
3. Reasons for de-accession (for example storage availability, deteriorating condition, duplication, transfer to a more culturally appropriate collection)

Disposal

Disposal refers to the physical removal of the object from a museum or collection. It can be done in a number of ways and the usual process is to consider the following options in order:

1. Return object to donor, or the donor's family, if the donor agrees and the donor can be located. The attempts to contact the donor will be recorded (see **Attachment B**).
2. Transfer to another institution if one can be located that will accept the object/item.
3. Exchange with another institution if possible
4. Sale by tender or auction for larger more valuable objects/items or other means recommended by the Collection Management Committee on a case by case basis. Proceeds can then be transferred to the MDHS Budget for either future acquisitions or other purposes such as conservation work for important collection items.
5. Destruction only to be considered if the object/item is in very poor condition, irreparably damaged or presents a hazard. Objects that are considered hazardous shall be disposed of in accordance to the relevant legislation.

After the object/item has been deaccessioned and disposed of records/registers/databases should include a record of the object and that it has been deaccessioned and the detail of its disposal. This creates a useful paper trail that can inform future volunteers working with the MDHS Collection.

A reporting template for disposal and deaccessioning is at **Attachment C**.

2.3 Significance

Acknowledging the part the Society's collection plays in the distributed national collection and as the stewards of a wide ranging collection the Society shall endeavour to assess individual objects within the collection for significance.

In accordance with the Significance 2.0 Guide², four primary criteria apply when assessing significance:

- Historic
- Artistic or aesthetic
- Scientific or research potential
- Social or spiritual

Four comparative criteria evaluate the degree of significance.

- Provenance
- Rarity or representativeness
- Condition or completeness
- Interpretive capacity

Significance will be a determining factor in any future conservation of an object.

² Significance 2.0 A guide to assessing the significance of collections, Collections Council of Australia, 2009

3.0 Preservation

The term preservation covers passive controls to prevent accelerated deterioration (environment and enclosures), treatments to stabilise an object, such as cleaning, and restoration. There is a distinction between conservation and restoration.

Conservation, treatments that stabilise the object so that it may be accessed but do not remove the evidence of the object's history.

Restoration, an attempt to return the object to as near original condition as possible.

The Society shall consider the most appropriate treatment based on the elements of significance and the potential for access (including exhibition and research).

The Society recognises that its limited resources do not always permit the adoption of formal standards or best practice in preservation. However, the Society will provide the best storage conditions available within its resources. Where an object is of significance it will be afforded priority for improved conditions as resources become available. All collection objects not on exhibition or being accessed for research will be kept in secure storage locations, e.g. the Collection Store (see **Attachment C**).

Due to the high cost, restoration will only be undertaken on the highest significance objects *if it is deemed appropriate* and funding can be secured.

4.0 Access

Exhibition

The value of a collection rests with the ability to provide access. For the Collection this will be provided primarily by exhibition at its premises. However, digital applications now have the potential to provide an alternative approach to the provision of access to the collection.

It is to be noted that some objects, due to age or other factors, are too fragile for display but remain a significant art of the collection. For example items of clothing such as wedding dresses.

Prior to going on exhibition all objects will be assessed for stability under exhibition conditions, light, vibration etc. Where it is practical all objects to be exhibited will be cleaned prior to exhibition.

Objects on long term exhibition will be cleaned in-situ where this is possible and creates no risk to the object.

The exhibition design will consider the following risks:

- Light dose
- Vibration
- Accidental damage
- Vandalism
- Theft

Research

Objects not on exhibition may also be accessed for research. Museum volunteers are to supervise all access and follow handling procedures that minimise damage to the object. No object may be removed from the Museum premises without written authorisation from the President.

Loans

The Society may from time to time loan collection objects to other organisations. Loans shall be approved with the following considerations:

- Security of the object, both in transport and at the new site.
- Long term impact on the object of the purpose for which the loan is requested
- Duration of the loan
- Compensation for loss or damage
- The value a loan may bring to the Society in terms of publicity or good will

All loans regardless of the duration are to be approved in writing by the President and recorded in a Loans Register.

5.0 Collection Management System

Museum Collection

To manage the needs of the objects in the collection, many of them highly fragile, and as resources permit, all objects will be accessioned into an accessible electronic data base. The Society has decided on eHive as it is widely adopted within the small/volunteer museum sector and has good technical support.

As part of the accessioning procedure, high quality illustrative photographs of each object will be added to the eHive database.

Any interested volunteers will be offered basic training in accessioning an object into eHive.

Genealogical Research Collection

The library collection covers publications of general historic interest, specific local and family histories, general guide to genealogical research and specific research material such as cemeteries, convicts, immigration etc. The collection is not limited to the Eurobodalla area. Local information from unpublished reports, newspapers etc are collected covering general subjects and specific local families.

Microfiche and microfilm were collected but much is now being replaced by digital material. Until April this year the Moruya Examiner was continuing to be collected on microfilm.

The Archives collection covers documents and material relating to local families and businesses.

The photograph collection consists of photographs of the Eurobodalla area and its families.

The Library and its research support is provided by volunteers.

Attachment A: Organisation Chart

MDHS Management Committee

Chair: President
Vice President
Treasurer
Secretary
3 Committee Members

Roles and responsibilities

- Work towards delivering the Society's guiding objectives
- Oversight of the operations of each sub-committee
- Oversight of the Society's finances and efficient management of its assets
- Publications including the MDHS Journal
- Management of the MDHS.org.au website
- Management of the Social Media sites (blog, facebook, flickr, pinterest, Instagram) on <https://mdhsociety.com>

Museum Collection Committee

Roles and responsibilities

- Manage the collection using the e-hive collection management system for acquisitions, de-accessions and disposals and associated register for loans and disposals or other changes to the collection that are not captured by e-hive
- Monitor and report on the condition of items and objects housed in the Museum and its associated buildings
- Prepare a program of exhibitions each year
- Operate the museum during opening hours agreed by the Management Committee
- Oversight of the volunteer team that work in the Museum
- Regular reporting to each meeting of the Management Committee
- Co-opt specialist expertise into the committee in consultation with Management Committee

Genealogical Research Collection Committee

Roles and responsibilities

- Manage the Genealogical Research Library through the following electronic databases:
 - Library Collection
 - Archives Collection
 - Combined Index (includes photographs)
 - Eurobodalla Place Names
- Management of the Genealogy Research Room
- Regular reporting to each meeting of the Management Committee

Attachment B: Processes for acquisition and de-accession and disposal

Acquisition

1. The President of the Moruya and District Historical Society be advised of an acquisition proposal in the first instance.
2. The Collection Committee consider the proposal and make a short report to the Management Committee taking into account the historical and thematic framework of the current Collection and the criteria for acquisition set out in this policy.
3. The Management Committee to make a decision on the proposal taking into account those criteria and the broader aims of the Society as expressed in the mission statement:
... to promote the preservation of local history through active conservation, education and involvement of the local community.
4. Collection Committee to arrange for the object to be accessioned via eHive for the Museum Collection or in the case of items relevant to the Genealogical Research Collection on relevant database held by the Genealogy Team.
5. President to write a letter to thank the donor if appropriate.

De-accession and disposal

1. In its consideration and recommendations on proposals for de-accession and disposal, the Collection Committee first consider whether MDHS has legal title to the object/item. If legal title is not held the process is more complex and expert advice should be sought (e.g. from Museums and Galleries NSW or the Arts Law Centre of Australia)
2. Details to be included in Collection Committee report: museum records on donor, date of donation/acquisition, accession number, provenance, reason for de-accession, additional information from advisers (e.g. on value) and recommended method of disposal.
3. MDHS Management Committee to decide on the proposal.
4. If there is agreement to de-accession the Management Committee to:
 - a. Identify any interested individuals, groups or other entities that may have an interest in the MDHS Committee decision and advise them of the proposed action
 - b. Decide on an appropriate disposal option
 - c. Consider placing the object in storage for a "cooling off" period of 12 months to allow adequate community consultation
 - d. Advise the Collection Committee to note the item has been de-accessioned in eHive in the case of the Museum Collection, and other relevant registers and databases in the Genealogy Research Collection
 - e. Establish a file/register for de-accessioned items with detailed information including a photograph for future reference

Attachment C: Deaccessioning Report Template

Name of the object _____

Accession number _____

Brief description & overall condition _____

Ownership MDHS
Donor to be contacted

Donors details _____

Date of donation _____

Reasons for deselection _____

Additional information _____

Method of disposal _____

Attachment D: Site Map

