Active Collections: What We’ve Learned

NEMA 2020

Stacen Goldman, Curator, Framingham History Center
Annie Murphy, Director, Framingham History Center
Rainey Tisdale, Independent Museum Professional
Understanding Active Collections

Rainey
The Active Collections Project
Leaner Collections with Greater Impact
activecollections.org

Trevor Jones
Director/CEO
History Nebraska

Rainey Tisdale
Independent Museum Professional

Elee Wood
Director of Education
The Huntington
Climate Collapse

Boston Climate March, 2019
Systemic Inequality

Lenard Hinds, artist
Hands Up Don’t Shoot: Artists Respond exhibition
organized by Alliance of Black Art Galleries, Ferguson, MO, 2014
Hyper Consumerism

Life at Home in the 21st Century, Arnold et al., p. 45
We collect objects that help residents see their place in a long continuum of people who, for hundreds of years, have found this place special.

- Belonging: how we claimed “this secluded place,” and how it in turn claimed us
- Living close to the land and the sea: the fields, the marshes, the stone beaches and the bay, the weather, the views, the light, the smells, potatoes and vegetable farming, oysters, clams, scallops, fishing, cooking
- The patterns and rituals of our community: the four seasons and their derivatives (fishing season, the return of the ospreys), the Memorial Day parade, the ferry, Wednesday dinners at the Congregational Church and Thursday dinners at the yacht club, annual events
- Our families: the old families, the new families, “families of choice,” the ways families experience this place and commit to it, Oysterponds’ family tree
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
<th>Tier 4</th>
<th>Tier 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant to Kentucky AND nationally or internationally significant</td>
<td>Significant historical value to Kentucky; strong provenance</td>
<td>Historical value to a location in Kentucky; limited provenance</td>
<td>Historical value to other locations; no Kentucky connection</td>
<td>Limited or no historical value; limited or no provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Few, if any, duplicates in this or other collections and/or of high</td>
<td>Few similar examples in this or other collections</td>
<td>Similar examples are held in this or other collections</td>
<td>Common in this or other collections</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
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<tr>
<td>monetary value</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rare, likely irreplaceable</td>
<td>Uncommon and difficult to replace</td>
<td>Moderately difficult to replace</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Could be used to tell multiple powerful stories about Kentucky and its</td>
<td>Could be used to tell multiple powerful stories about the state</td>
<td>Plays a supporting role in telling stories about the state</td>
<td>May play a supporting role or illustrate a concept, but is not the</td>
<td>Plays a minor role</td>
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<td>place in the nation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>focus</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Example: Portraits of Dennis and Diademia Doram</td>
<td>Example: The coat Governor William Goebel was wearing when he was</td>
<td>Example: Copper still</td>
<td>Example: Flapper dress</td>
<td>Example: Woodworking planes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fatally shot</td>
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An overview Library of Tibetan Works & Archives

Film Still, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives overview video
How We Are Creating an Active Collection at Framingham History Center

Annie & Stacen
Active Collections

In the interest of ensuring that our collecting practices and collections care always reflect upon our mission, the Board of Directors voted to adopt “A Manifesto for Active Collections” on May 24, 2016. Informed by the philosophy of Active Collections, we hope to ensure the healthiest possible collection, and one that truly serves the people of Framingham.

Read the Manifesto
Framingham History Center - Costume Collection Deaccession Review
Framingham History Center - Educational Programs
Sample of Objects - Smith Collection
Our goal is not simply to collect and preserve things, but rather to inspire, enlighten and engage our members and the community. We believe some objects support our mission better than others based on the stories they tell and the ideas they illuminate.

...We do not have the staff capacity for the research and conservation necessary for exhibit preparation for all of these items without taking away resources needed for other parts of our collection. Artifacts from the Colonial era, the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, Shoppers World, or Dennison Mfg. Co., for example, more broadly reflect Framingham’s history and should receive our financial and human resources.
We collect artifacts, tangible and intangible, that are *quintessentially* Framingham. Our collections hold up a mirror to the community while answering the question “What makes this place special?” Our collections tell the stories of:

- Our Special Places: villages, neighborhoods, and communal spaces
- Industry and Business: The evolution from cottage industries to global corporations and their impact on the community (straw bonnets, mills and manufacturing, biotech…)
- The Creative Spirit: moments of invention, innovation, and art
- The Land: Its variety, its beauty, and its natural resources
- The Changing Built Environment: the coexistence of rural, urban, and suburban development
- A Regional and Cultural Crossroads: The intersection of railroads, highways, and diverse communities
- The Volunteer Spirit: serving community and country (The Heart Study, Civil War enlistment, Peter Parker in China, the Military Girls’ Club…)
- The Lived Experience of Framingham: attending its schools, building its houses, working in its factories
- Families: Old families, new families, and families of choice; the ways they direct and drive the community...

The FHC does not collect:
- Artifacts based solely on aesthetics
- Artifacts that have no specific tie to Framingham
- Artifacts with no provenance or story

Such objects may serve as exhibit props or as part of the hands on/education collection, but should not be formally accessioned.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1: known Framingham provenance, 2: known non-Framingham or undocumented Framingham provenance, 3: none)</td>
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<td>Condition</td>
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<td>(1: excellent/good, 2: fair, 3: poor)</td>
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<td>Relates to Mission/ Collections Scope</td>
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<td>(1: most, 3: least)</td>
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<td>Fills a Gap</td>
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<td>(1: most, 3: least)</td>
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<td>Storage</td>
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<td>(1: easy, 3: hard)</td>
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<td>Significance</td>
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<td>(1: Local + Nat'l/Int'l, 2: Local, 3: None)</td>
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<td>Rarity</td>
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<td>(1: rare, 3: common)</td>
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<td>Research/Exhibition Value</td>
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<td>(1: high, 3: low)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Score</strong></td>
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**Final Tier (Circle one)**
- Tier 1: 8-12
- Tier 2: 13-19
- Tier 3: 20-24

**Automatic NOs (Circle all that apply)**
- Duplicate
- Size
- Hazardous Material
- Human Remains

FHC Tiering Worksheet
Online poll, Framingham’s Top 10

Framingham’s Top 10
In person (left) and
digital exhibition (below)

HELP CO-CURATE OUR NEXT EXHIBITION!

The Framingham History Center is mounting an exhibition of our “Top Ten,” the ten items from our collection that the people of Framingham HAVE to see, but our short list is still too long. Choose your three favorite objects from the list below. The three items that get the most votes will be “Framingham’s Picks” in our upcoming exhibition. After you vote, please feel free to leave your thoughts, memories, poetry, artistic inspiration, or anything at all that these objects spark in your mind and we may incorporate your words into the exhibition.

Already stated for the exhibition are the Shoppers’ World sign, Demarest products, and our two suffragist “Jailed For Freedom” pins. We can’t wait to find out what Framingham picks to join them!
Top 10 Strategies:

1. Learn about Active Collections
2. Get institutional buy-in
3. Educate your community
4. Train your collections committee
5. Create a poetic collecting scope
6. Create a collections tier chart
7. Create an education collection
8. Place a moratorium on collecting
9. Make your top tier sing with poetic interpretive techniques
10. Stop being afraid! Rely on people to be reasonable