

Appendix N: Reproductions, Period Pieces, Living History Items, Exhibit Props, and Outdoor Exhibits

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Appendix N: Reproductions, Period Pieces, Living History Items, Exhibit Props, and Outdoor Exhibits

N.1. Overview

N.1.1 What information will I find in this appendix?

The information in this appendix will help you decide how to document reproductions, period pieces, living history items, exhibit props, and outdoor exhibits. These types of objects are used for exhibitions, education, and interpretation. Although they are used for museum purposes, they are not always accessioned and cataloged into the museum collection. This section will help you determine when to include these types of materials in the museum collection.

N.1.2 What is an original/site-associated item?

An original/site associated item is one that historically belonged to or is connected to the site.

N.1.3 What is a reproduction?

A reproduction is the reconstruction or fabrication of an accurate copy of an original object/item. The original object/item may:

- be too fragile to exhibit
- no longer exist except in photographs or drawings
- not be in the park's collection

A reproduction can be off-the-shelf or custom-made.

Example: the reproduction of Martin Van Buren's dining room table

N.1.4 What is a period piece?

A period piece is an item made during the site's period of significance, but the item has no historic association to the site.

Example: a horsehair-covered footstool from circa 1855 purchased at an antique mall

Period of Significance is the main historical time frame for the site or the time frame chosen as the focus for the site. For example, the period of significance for the Old

House (or Peacefield) at Adams NHP is 1787-1927. John Adams purchased the house in 1787, and the last member of the fourth generation, Brooks Adams, died in 1927.

N.1.5 What are living history materials?

Living history materials are props, reproductions or period pieces acquired specifically for consumptive use by interpreters as part of living history demonstrations or exhibitions.

Example: a wash tub used for laundry demonstrations

Note: Period pieces should only be used consumptively in living history demonstrations when a suitable substitute cannot be found or is cost prohibitive.

N.1.6 What is an exhibit prop?

An exhibit prop has no historic association with the park. It is an item that is added to an exhibition but is only used to enhance interpretation.

Example: artificial apples in a fruit bowl or books acquired only to fill a bookshelf

N.1.7 What is an outdoor exhibit?

Outdoor exhibits consist of an object or collection of objects on public display outdoors. The objects are usually large, such as farm equipment or cannon, and are movable. Fixed monuments are tracked in the List of Classified Structures (LCS). Ships and railroad cars, although movable, are also tracked in the LCS.

Example: cannon on the surrender field at Yorktown

N.2. Reproductions

N.2.1 Why do parks acquire reproductions?

Parks acquire reproductions for exhibits and interpretation. A park may decide to use reproductions when:

- the park does not have the specific items in the collection needed for an exhibit.
- original pieces in the collection are too fragile for exhibit or need to be protected from extended exposure or loss.

Reproducing objects of religious or spiritual significance to a traditionally associated people requires consultation. The park will consult with culturally affiliated or traditionally associated peoples to determine the religious status of any object whose sacred nature is not confirmed (Management Policies 2006, 5.3.5.5.3).

N.2.2 What kinds of reproductions does the NPS use?

Parks use several different types of reproductions in exhibits. These include those:

- available on the commercial market
- created for a specific exhibit installation or by a contractor or park staff
- based on objects from the park's collection or another park's or institution's or private collection

Chapters 4 and 5 in the *Museum Handbook*, Part III, provide additional information on two-dimensional and three-dimensional reproductions, including commercial use.

N.2.3 How are reproductions different from objects in the museum collection?

Although reproductions have monetary and interpretive value, they don't have the associative or site-specific value attached to original/site-associated museum objects. However, in certain cases, reproductions may be the only remaining evidence of the originals. They may also be inherently significant themselves, such as the Navajo rug reproductions at Hubbell Trading Post NHS.

N.3. Period Pieces

N.3.1 Why do parks acquire period pieces?

Parks acquire period pieces for the same reasons they acquire reproductions. Some period pieces may cost less to procure for an exhibit than a reproduction.

N.3.2 Can period pieces be used for the same purpose as a reproduction?

Yes. Period pieces may be acquired to serve the same purpose as a reproduction.

N.3.3 How are period pieces different from original objects in the museum collection?

Although period pieces are from the same time frame as the park, they do not have direct provenance to the park. They have been acquired to substitute for original objects.

Note: Some parks, such as San Francisco Maritime, have scopes related to themes rather than site-specific people and places. Distinguishing between period pieces and original items at these sites can be difficult. Determining what should be accessioned must be made in consultation with the collections advisory committee and the curator of the collection.

N.4. Accessioning and Cataloging Reproductions and Period Pieces

N.4.1 Must I accession and catalog all reproductions and period pieces?

No. Cataloging provides the maximum control and protection for an object. However, maintaining accountability for dozens of reproduction items takes valuable time away from managing the historically important objects in the collection.

Determining whether or not to accession and catalog a reproduction or period piece depends on an evaluation of its purpose and its scientific, cultural, historic, educational, esthetic, or monetary value. Some types of objects can be evaluated as a group. Others, such as rare or expensive custom reproduction textiles or period furniture, may need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Example: Cannon mounted on reproduction carriages are a common occurrence in military parks. Although carriages are expensive, a park may decide not to catalog them because they deteriorate in outdoor conditions.

N.4.2 Who should make the decision about when to accession a reproduction or period piece?

All accessions of reproductions and period pieces must be reviewed by a collections advisory committee that includes the curator of the collection. Refer to Chapter 6 for information on committee members and procedures.

N.4.3 What should the committee consider when evaluating a reproduction or period piece?

The collections committee should consider a variety of criteria when evaluating a reproduction or period piece. Criteria to consider (in no priority order) include:

- Scope of Collections (SOCS). Does the park SOCS provide guidelines on reproductions and period pieces in the collection? Parks should include a statement about the types of reproductions and period pieces that are included and accepted into the collection.
- Research and educational value. Does the reproduction or period piece add to information about the collection that would be of value for research and education?
- Unique attributes. Does the reproduction or period piece contain unique attributes that complement the existing collection?
- Technical accuracy and workmanship. Is the reproduction or period piece a museum quality piece in its own right?
- Artist or maker. Does the artist or maker of the reproduction have a special association with the site?
- Monetary value. Should the reproduction or period piece be accessioned because it is of high monetary value, which would make it difficult to replace (possible benchmark value of \$5000 or more)?
- Number of objects. If there are a large number of similar reproductions or period pieces, should one or a sample be put in the collection rather than all of them?
- Longevity. Has the reproduction or period piece been in the park for such a long period of time that it could be considered museum material? Clearly mark reproductions or period pieces that are retained in the collection so that future staff do not mistake them for original material.
- Rarity. Would the park have great difficulty in replacing the reproduction or period piece due to technical accuracy and materials?
- Level of documentation. Does the reproduction or period piece have a particularly noteworthy provenance that can justify its inclusion in the collection?
- Intended use. Will the object be used consumptively, such as a reproduction carpet?

- Condition and completeness. Is the reproduction or period piece in good condition with all its component parts?
- Long-term preservation costs. Will the park be able to, or want to, pay for conservation treatment of the object in the future?
- Environment. Is the reproduction or period piece in an environment that does not meet museum standards, such as reproduction bedding on the *USS Cassin Young*?
- Storage space. When the reproduction or period piece is no longer on exhibit, is it an item that the park wants to keep in museum storage? Is there adequate storage space available?
- Interpretive focus. Has there been a change in interpretive focus at the park that would make the reproduction or period piece fit the SOCS?
- Exhibit termination. Does the reproduction or period piece need to be re-evaluated at the termination of an exhibit? Can it be used again/recycled for future exhibits?

Refer to the checklist in Figure 1 to help determine when a reproduction or period piece should be accessioned and cataloged.

N.4.4 May I remove reproductions or period pieces that are currently in the collection?

Reproductions or period pieces that are already cataloged should remain in the collection unless they:

- do not fit the SOCS
- are badly damaged or deteriorated
- there is a strong justification that the items were accessioned in error

Refer to Chapter 6 in this handbook for instructions on deaccessioning objects and documenting the removal of items that were accessioned in error.

A collections advisory committee must review and recommend deaccessions and the removal of non-museum property that has been accessioned in error.

Don't reuse the catalog numbers of reproductions or period pieces that are deaccessioned or removed from the collection as accessioned in error.

N.4.5 What if the park has a large number of reproductions to deaccession?

Parks with large numbers of reproductions already in the museum collection may wish to reevaluate existing collections. The park must have an up-to-date SOCS that specifically addresses reproductions and period pieces. A collections committee must evaluate these items against the factors in this appendix. The Regional Curator must also review and approve the committee's recommendations.

N.4.6 What about reproductions and period pieces that are used consumptively?

The superintendent can request the Regional Director to approve a cataloged reproduction or period piece for consumptive use. At the end of the object's useful life, the object is deaccessioned through a Board of Survey. Refer to the Consumptive Use section in Chapter 6 for information on permission for consumptive use. Generally, reproductions can receive routine approval for consumptive use.

The park may want to determine the disposition of some cataloged reproductions, such as curtains and rugs, which will deteriorate from use over time. At acquisition, note on the catalog record that the object will be destroyed through a Board of Survey at the end of its useful life. Note the final disposition in the Description field on the catalog record and in the accession folder.

N.4.7 How will reproductions or period pieces be tracked if they are not cataloged?

There is no service-wide system for tracking reproductions or period pieces that are not cataloged as part of a museum collection. However, as government property, these objects need to be tracked even if they are not cataloged. A few options include:

- listing reproductions and period pieces used in an exhibit in the Exhibits Module of ICMS (or its successor). The exhibit record for each exhibit can include a list of the uncataloged reproductions or period pieces in that exhibit. Enter the list in the Comments field or one of the User fields.

- tracking reproductions and period pieces through Excel spreadsheets, an Access database, or a park-specific tracking system
- using the personal property system for items over \$5000
- tracking expensive exhibit pieces (such as reproduction furniture) through the Facility Management Software System (FMSS)
- creating a visual inventory system that uses photographs of a case or wall labeled with numbers corresponding to a list of objects

N.4.8 Are there special procedures for documenting reproductions and period pieces that are cataloged?

Yes. Do the following when documenting reproductions and period pieces that are cataloged:

- Add an R or a P to the catalog number that is marked on the object. Clearly and permanently mark the object in an accessible, but not obtrusive, location. Refer to appendix J in this handbook for marking techniques.
- Complete the Reproduction field on the ICMS catalog record, selecting either Reproduction or Period Piece. Include a note in the Description field stating that the object is a reproduction or period piece.
- Use the accession or catalog folder to store any information about the purchase or manufacture of the reproduction or period piece.

N.5. Living History Items

N.5.1 Are living history items part of the museum collection?

No. The park will manage reproductions and period pieces acquired and used for living history separately from the museum collection.

Parks must store living history items in a separate location from the museum collection. However, in some instances, if they are clearly marked, living history items can be part of an exhibit with cataloged collections.

Living history items are not museum property and must be managed according to the personal property system (Director's Order 44) and not entered into ICMS.

Remove living history items that have been inappropriately accessioned into the museum collection. Refer to Chapter 6 in this handbook for information on removing non-museum property from the collection.

N.5.2 How does the park document living history items?

Staff responsible for living history items should clearly and permanently mark them as living history.

N.6. Exhibit Props

N.6.1 What's the difference between reproductions and exhibit props?

Reproductions are exact or close imitations of museum objects. Exhibit props are produced or acquired to enhance an exhibit and are not intended to be museum objects. Examples of exhibit props include:

- molded plastic fruit or food, candles, Christmas decorations
- product boxes and cans to use as shelf fillers in a store
- panels and dioramas
- display panels
- photographs and other display art, graphics, and text labels
- mannequins and other types of museum supports

N.6.2 How should I document exhibit props?

Don't accession and catalog exhibit props (see 6.4 for rare exceptions). Clearly and permanently mark exhibit props as "Exhibit Prop" or "Prop." Mark them in an accessible, but not obtrusive, location. Track them in the same method the park uses for other uncataloged reproductions.

N.6.3 What if I have exhibit props in my museum collection?

Remove exhibit props that have been inappropriately accessioned into the museum collection. Refer to Chapter 6 in this handbook for information on removing non-museum property from the collection.

N.6.4 When should I accession and catalog exhibit props?

In rare cases, you may want to accession and catalog old exhibit props as examples of:

- notable craftsmanship or maker
- the history of the park
- exhibit techniques or interpretive approaches

N.7. Outdoor Exhibits

N.7.1 Do I catalog objects in outdoor exhibits?

Accession and catalog movable objects in outdoor exhibits if they:

- fit the park's SOCS
- possess scientific, cultural, historic, educational, esthetic, or monetary value and have a direct tie or association to the site

Examples include cannon, farm equipment, and automobiles.

N.7.2 Do I catalog fixed outdoor structures such as monuments?

No. The List of Classified Structures (LCS) defines fixed outdoor monuments as historic structures. NPS-28 *Cultural Resource Management Guideline* defines historic structures as “usually immovable, although some ...are mobile by design.” They include monuments, nautical vessels, railroad locomotives, and outdoor sculpture.

If pieces of fixed historic structures become detached and cannot be reattached, accession and catalog them as you would architectural elements.

Note: Some large movable outdoor items such as ships and train cars are on the LCS and also cataloged. This determination is made by the park.

N.7.3 Do I complete a facility checklist for museum items in outdoor exhibits?

No. Do not do a facility checklist for outdoor exhibits. Designate the items in outdoor exhibits as controlled property so that they are part of the annual inventory.

Decision Checklist

The collections committee can use this optional checklist to make decisions about including reproductions and period pieces in the museum collection.

Y N

Scope of Collections. Does the park SOCS provide guidelines on reproductions/period pieces in the collection?

Research and educational value. Does the reproduction/period piece add to information about the collection that would be of value for research and education?

Unique attributes. Does the reproduction/period piece contain unique attributes that complement the existing collection?

Technical accuracy and workmanship. Is the reproduction/period piece a museum quality piece in its own right?

Artist or maker. Does the artist or maker of the reproduction have a special association with the site?

Monetary value. Should the reproduction/period piece be accessioned because it is of high monetary value, which would make it difficult to replace (possible benchmark value of \$5000 or more)?

Number of objects. If there are a large number of similar reproductions/period pieces, should one or a sample be put in the collection rather than all of them?

Longevity. Has the reproduction/period piece been in the park for such a long period of time that it could be considered museum material? Clearly mark reproductions/period pieces that are retained in the collection so that future staff do not mistake them for original material.

Rarity. Would the park have great difficulty in replacing the reproduction/period piece due to workmanship and materials?

Level of documentation. Does the reproduction/piece have a particularly noteworthy provenance that can justify its inclusion in the collection?

Intended Use. Will the objects be used consumptively, such as a reproduction carpet?

Condition and completeness. Is the reproduction/period piece in good condition with all its component parts?

Long-term preservation costs. Will the park be able to, or want to, pay for conservation treatment of the object in the future?

Environment. Is the reproduction/period piece in an environment that does not meet museum standards?

Storage space. When the reproduction/period piece is no longer on exhibit, is it an item that the park wants to keep in museum storage? Is there adequate storage space available?

Interpretive focus. Has there been a change in interpretive focus at the park that would make the reproduction/period piece fit the SOCS?

Exhibit termination. Does the reproduction/period piece need to be re-evaluated at the termination of an exhibit? Can it be used again/recycled for future exhibits?

Figure 1: Decision Checklist (optional)