

Executive Summary:

Howard County Historical Society Collecting Plan Stewart E. Lauterbach, Bonnie Van Kley, Kelly Thompson Karickhoff Adopted 2/19/2008

1. Introduction

The Howard County Historical Society, designated official custodian of the county history, has been collecting historical materials for the past 80+ years. During this time little discrimination was exercised, and the society currently finds itself responsible for over 30,000 items. Originally, the society collected because that was what museums did. Realizing that staff time, space, and funds for collecting are limited, the society has determined that it cannot continue operating in this manner. (An analysis was done on the amount of actual time spent doing collection work and it is instructive to note that even with the help of volunteers, the collections department is only able to do the amount of work equivalent to that of 2.25 staff members each week. This is no doubt a result of the necessity of the small staff having to wear many hats in the organization, and the specialized nature of much of the work, which requires extensive training of volunteers.)

Since 1998 the focus has been on gaining physical control of the collection, knowing what the society owns and where it is located. Data has been entered into a computer catalog using PastPerfect collection management software. During this process the society learned that the significance of the various items in its collection is quite disproportionate, with much contextual information known for some objects, and very little known about many others.

The purpose of the collecting plan is to provide the staff with a document which will convey definite guidelines for future collecting and a framework for making daily collecting decisions. It may also serve as the basis of future exhibit work.

The collecting plan took two years of study, research and reflection by members of the collection management committee, and the HCHS staff.

2. Relationship of collecting plan to other HCHS policy and planning documents

The collecting plan and society missions

The collecting plan supports the mission of the historical society by articulating guidelines that will shape future collecting decisions. Furthermore, the Collection Committee recommends that the Board of Trustees adopt the following proposed mission statements for the collection department and the museum. These statements attempt to provide more clarity regarding the reason for maintaining a collection, as well as delineating the uses to which individual collection items may be put. Both are modeled on the mission of the Stan Mohr Library which states:

The mission of the Stan Mohr Local History Library is to collect, preserve, provide physical protection for, and make accessible to the public the photographic and documentary history of the people, organizations, and institutions of Howard County, Indiana, and to provide support for the Howard County Historical Museum. *Minutes of*

the Howard County Historical Society Library Committee Meeting, November 27, 2000. Approved by the board of trustees at their November 21, 2000 meeting.

Action Item: Create a mission statement for the Collection Department

Proposed Mission: The mission of the collection department is to collect, preserve, provide physical protection for, and make accessible to the public the significant photographic and documentary history, and material culture of the people, organizations, and institutions of Howard County, and to create and manage the HCHS collection in a manner that supports the programs of the society.

Action Item: Create mission statement for the Museum

Proposed Mission: The mission of the Howard County Museum is to collect, preserve, provide physical protection for, and make accessible to the public the significant material culture of Howard County through exhibition and programming, and to provide support for the Stan Mohr Local History Library.

The Collecting Plan and the Long Range Plan

The HCHS operates using the principles of long-range planning. The current long-range plan covers 2005 through 2009 and consists of goals in five major areas, which are: 1) funding, 2) wow factor, 3) staffing, 4) facilities, and 5) collections.

The collecting plan relates to the long-range plan in two ways. Primarily, the long-range plan addresses the specific needs of the collection through objectives listed under goal number five referenced above. The plan also assigns responsibility for completion of these tasks to the appropriate staff, volunteer, or committee. Secondly, each of the other four goals in the long-range plan will have an impact on implementing the collecting plan.

3. History of Collecting Efforts

The plan contains a detailed history of collecting efforts made by the staff during the life of the society. In general, the longer the society has existed, the more professional it has become in managing its collection.

4. Vision for the collection

Since the HCHS is the county agency designated as custodian of Howard County history, preservation of that history is the society's first priority. The society envisions further serving its patrons in two primary ways: 1) The museum will showcase the collection primarily through exhibits and programming, and will also provide support for the library. 2) The library will maintain collections primarily for research, and will also provide support for the museum.

Furthermore, the society's vision for the collection is to create and maintain an assemblage of materials, which document people, places, and events that are historically significant to Howard County for the purposes of research, exhibition, and programming. In this vision there will be an appropriate place for everything, and everything will be in its place, resulting in the society gaining *physical control* of the collection. The society's collection will be culled to the point that only those artifacts with demonstrable significance to Howard County history remain. Computer records will be completed for each item detailing why each item is significant to Howard County history, thereby establishing *intellectual control* of the collection. Items in the collection will represent topics identified as significant through community surveys and in the timeline of Howard County historical events. Additional items will be added to the collection as they are needed or as they become available. Professional collection management standards will have been met. The museum collection has been organized and will be exhibited on a rotating basis. The archival collection has been organized and serves as a basis for personal research, society publications, educational programs, and exhibits. The society will use appropriate methods of documenting Howard County history such as photography and oral history projects

5. Intellectual Framework

In an attempt to answer the question, "What should the HCHS collect?" the society surveyed eight community groups, asking them to specify the parts of Howard County history that they felt were most important. The results of this survey were tabulated in order to create a prioritized list of 20 historical areas for future collecting. These are:

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|------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1) Business and industry | 8) Culture | 15) Natural disasters |
| 2) People | 9) Rural life | 16) Medical profession |
| 3) Kokomo | 10) Transportation | 17) Architecture |
| 4) Racial/cultural diversity | 11) Government | 18) Communications |
| 5) Education | 12) Pioneer spirit | 19) Howard County |
| 6) Military | 13) Sports | 20) Seiberling Mansion |
| 7) Clubs and organizations | 14) Prehistoric era | |

In addition, a timeline of historical events was developed based on several sources including the county historian, a local history professor, the Kokomo-Howard County Public Library, and two local history books, *Howard County: A Pictorial History* and *Kokomo: A Pictorial History*. This information was then cross-referenced with the themes generated by the community survey. The timeline should be considered a working document, and as the staff learns more about Howard County history, additional information will be added.

6. Collecting Criteria

The society will consider only those items that are determined to be compelling enough to warrant further study to determine their significance to Howard County history, and will accept only those items determined significant. In comparing existing or potential collection items to the intellectual framework, with the goal of shaping the ideal collection, the following criteria adapted from the model set forth in the Australian Heritage Collections Council's online publication, *Significance: A Guide To Assessing The Significance Of Cultural Heritage Objects and Collections*¹ will be used in conjunction with a set of criteria developed by the HCHS staff. The AHCC primary criteria are: historic, aesthetic,

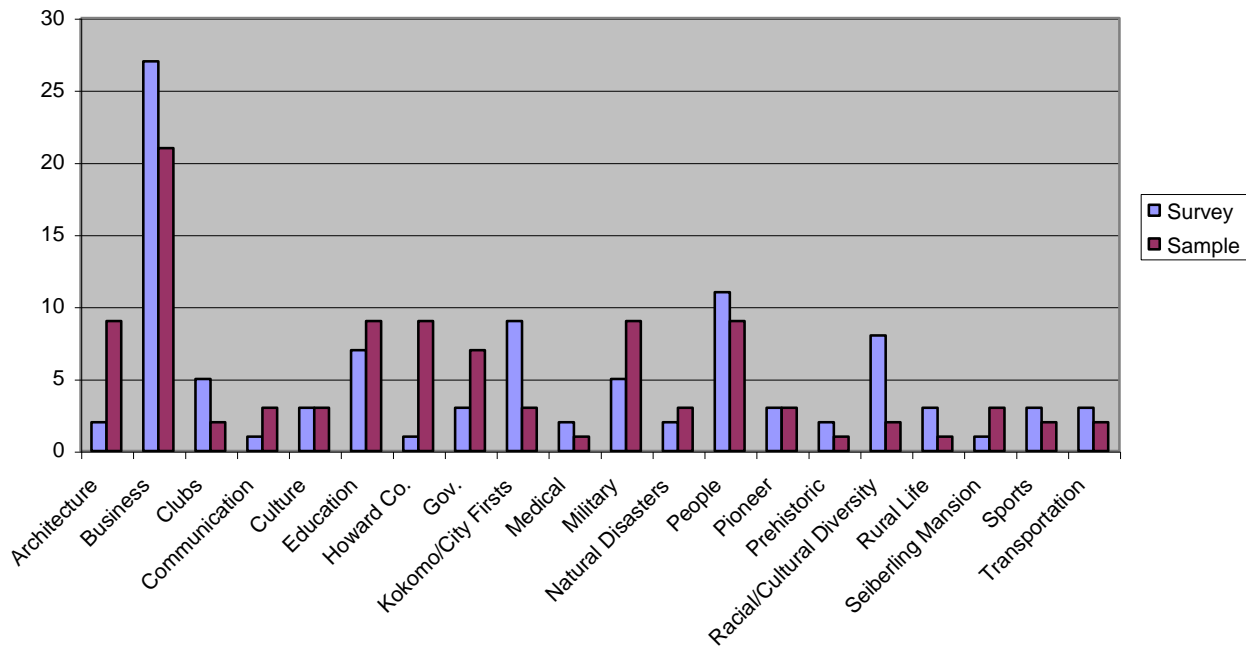
research, and social significance. The AHCC comparative criteria are: provenance, representative-ness, rarity, condition, and interpretive potential. The additional HCHS staff criteria are: contextual information, clear title, relationship to other collection items, possible “endangered” nature, monetary value, effective means of preservation, and ability to care for an item.

7. Analysis of Existing Collection

Analysis of the current collection resulted in the following information.

1. One way of describing the collection is by using the PastPerfect catalog categories. In 2006 the catalog consisted of 12,420 objects, 11,062 photos, 4,506 archival records, and 1,609 volumes in the library creating a total collection of 29,597 items.
2. When viewed according to the categories outlined in *The Revised Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging*² 36% of the collection is made up of historic images, 19% of the collection is made up of other documentary artifacts, and 12% of the collection is made up of personal artifacts.
3. In order to evaluate the significance of the existing collection, collection committee members and the board of trustees participated in evaluating a random sample of items in the collection. The information from this exercise was tabulated and cross-referenced with the community survey, resulting in a graph indicating strengths and weaknesses in the collection. It is also worth noting that the sampling participants felt that only about one-third of the items they reviewed were significant and worth preserving.

Table B: Comparison of Survey/Random Sample



Although both the survey and the random sampling are quite elementary, the fact that the HCHS is institutionally at a place where it can ask these kinds of questions and suggest tentative answers indicates that the society has become more sophisticated in its approach to managing its collection.

Ultimately, what matters most is how well objects in the collection can be used to tell the Howard County story.

8. Connections to Other Institutions

The plan identifies 18 other local, or regional organizations that are either in some way interested in Howard County history or maintain collections relevant to the county in some way. The plan also makes suggestions about how the Howard County Historical Society should interact with these groups.

9. Implementation Strategy

The plan outlines five goals for work in the area of current collections. These are: 1) solve catalog problems, 2) process the backlog, 3) deaccession appropriate items, 4) assign permanent locations and maximize storage space and 5) create a case for significance of artifacts in the existing collection.

The plan outlines six goals for work in the area of future collecting. These are: 1) actively collect artifacts according to the collecting plan, 2) obtain funding for special collection projects, 3) create a conservation plan, 4) improve security, 5) create an emergency preparedness plan, and 7) secure additional staff and volunteers needed to support the collection.

Each of these goals is followed by a list of objectives and action steps. Each January the collection management committee and staff will meet to develop further plans to reach these goals.

10. Evaluation

The collection management committee will revisit the annual collection department goals each July to monitor and evaluate the progress of the staff and committees. At this time the plan of work will be modified as needed, and a report will be made to the board of trustees for approval.

11. Revision

To coincide with the society's long-range plan, the collecting plan will be reviewed and revised every five years, beginning in 2009, by the collection management committee and staff. Changes will be made as needed, and the plan will be presented to the board of trustees for approval.

Notes:

¹Commonwealth of Australia. Heritage Collections Council. Significance: A Guide to Assessing the Significance of Cultural Heritage Objects and Collections. 2001. 1 Nov. 2007
<http://sector.amol.org.au/publications_archive/museum_management/significance> (p.). All further references to this work appear in the text.

²James R. Blackaby, Patricia Greeno and The Nomenclature Committee, The Revised Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging: A Revised and Expanded Version of Robert G. Chenhall's System for Classifying Man-Made Objects (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1995)