

Carlyle Connection

“It’s a fine beginning.”



In My Humble Opinion: The National Trust’s Collections Management Policy is Not Ready to Eat

By Max A. van Balgooy

Last year, the National Trust for Historic Preservation adopted a new Collections Management Policy (CMP) and widely promoted it at professional conferences and in national publications as a model to house museums and historic sites to resolve some of their stewardship challenges. At its heart is,

“a new approach—one that treats the historic structures and landscapes, and the object collections, as being the same type of resource. This approach places the historic buildings and landscapes on a par with objects and documents, strengthening the interconnected stewardship and interpretation of these historic resources.”

It’s a good idea but it’s not a new approach.

Early in the twentieth century, museums of various types began collecting buildings. Henry Ford moved Edison’s laboratory and the Wright Brothers bicycle shop to his Greenfield Village, John D. Rockefeller quietly bought dozens of buildings to create Colonial Williamsburg, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art installed the ballroom of Gadsby’s Tavern as a featured object of its 1924 American Wing. Much later, landscapes were considered worthy of preservation and now most historic estates, such as Casa del Herrero, Miller House and Garden, and Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, treat their gardens and landscapes with the same respect as the furniture and art works at their sites.

The National Trust’s rationale for their new approach is that, “conflicts between the care of objects, on one hand, and the care of buildings and grounds, on the other, are inevitable and can be detrimental to the long-term

stewardship of all of those resources.” The Association for Preservation Technology International (APT) and the American Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) responded to this challenge more than twenty years ago when they issued the New Orleans Charter in 1992. The Charter recognized that “historic structures and the contents placed within them deserve equal consideration in planning for their care” and that “institutions’ statements of mission should recognize the need to preserve the unique character of both the historic structure and artifacts.” While the National Trust’s CMP redefinition of collections isn’t provoking much controversy, of much greater concern, however, is that it leaves unresolved several key aspects of collections management that will easily trip up those who adopt it without scrutiny.



Colonial Williamsburg

Museums and historic landmarks face a tremendous amount of deferred and ongoing maintenance. For some, the National Trust’s CMP opens up new sources of funding to better care for their buildings and landscapes. Revenues

from the sale of objects, such as books, paintings, and furniture, can be used for the “direct care of the Museum Collections,” which can include buildings and landscapes, according to the National Trust. Many CMPs allow for deaccession funds to be used for the conservation of a table lamp but not a wall sconce, simply because one is attached to the wall and the other isn’t, although both are equally important to the interpretation of the room. That seems to be a tradition, however. No current professional code or standard defines collections based on mobility, size, type, or age—although that frequently occurs in the policies of individual museums. Instead, you’ll find that the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) simply states that collections should be, “appropriate for [the organization’s] mission.”

The Most Troubling Word in the Museum Lexicon

Much more vexing is “direct care,” a term that is undefined by the field and as elusive as “art” or “obscenity.” A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections notes that AAM introduced “direct care” in its Code of Ethics in 1994 in response to a growing number of museums facing financial difficulties, such as the New York Historical Society. To achieve financial sustainability, these museums proposed paring down their collections to a manageable size. Rather than acquire more objects, they successfully lobbied that these funds from sales could be also used for the “direct care of collections.”

Unfortunately, AAM did not define “direct care” and its vagueness has troubled the field ever since. Witness the recent misguided circular logic at the Edsel and Eleanor Ford House, who sold a painting in its collection to create a \$100 million endowment to care for the collection, with plans to buy plants to restore the historic landscape and reconstruct lost buildings (which no doubt will require more funds for maintenance; perhaps they have more paintings to sell?). This wasn’t an ordinary painting hidden in storage for years—the Fords owned and displayed the Cézanne landscape in their house since the mid-20th century, so it clearly fell within the scope of collections and now no longer available to the public. Clarity is on the horizon. Twenty years after it introduced “direct care” into museum vocabulary, AAM formed a taskforce in May 2014 to define this troublesome term and hopes to present its recommendations in 2016.

The National Trust’s CMP attempts to define “direct care” but it still lacks precision: “proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned objects...may be used for (1) the replenishment or care of other objects . . . And/or (2) the preservation of historic structures or historic landscape features.” Replenishment? Care? Preservation? Could funds be used to install a new roof, replace a dead tree, mow the lawn, fill a pothole in a driveway, or breed historic cattle? The National Trust stated they would be cautious and that they need to establish “appropriate protections to ensure that collections are not ‘cherry-picked’ to provide operating funds for the site”—but those protections do not seem to have been put in place when its board adopted the new collections management policy in June 2014.

Remember When Good Fences Made Good Neighbors?

Those protections could perhaps be found in a Scope of Collections. According to AAM, a Collections Management Policy should include a Scope of Collections, which is: “a broad description of the museum’s collections and an explanation of how and what the museum collects and how those collections are used. This section can include a brief history of the collections and a review of the collection’s strengths and weaknesses. It often sets guidelines for growing and developing the collection, which museums can then use in collections planning.” The Scope establishes the boundaries of the collections—what’s in, what’s not—so that the organization can make decisions about what to acquire and remove. The Scope also establishes priorities for care and responsibility, which is especially important when deciding what preservation work is eligible for deaccession funds.



*Items included in Carlyle House’s Scope of Collections.
Photo courtesy Scott Herzing.*

The National Trust encourages buildings and landscapes to be part of the collection, but that doesn't get you very far when developing a Scope. It's no better than saying collections should have furniture, paintings, or clothing. A Scope should define time and place, and perhaps even association, such as "paintings owned or displayed by James Madison at Montpelier from 1817 to 1836" or "seating furniture made in New Mexico by Spanish settlers during the Colonial Period." Cliveden in Philadelphia adopted a Collections Scope in 2009 that could serve as a model for other historic sites.

The National Trust's CMP requires a Collections Plan, which includes a vision, rationale, and scope for its collections, but ironically, the National Trust itself lacks a scope or plan for its collection of historic sites. Instead, it pushes that responsibility out to the individual sites, most of whom do not own the collections (they are owned by the National Trust) or have a collections plan (or even a dedicated curator or collections manager). Indeed, most museums and historic sites do not have a collections plan and in this regard, the National Trust could help the field by developing and providing models of plans from a variety of sites.

Unintended Financial Consequences

"Direct care" can be defined and collections scopes developed, but there's a third big issue that was overlooked: finances. The Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) and Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) establish the standards for audited financial statements. According to their rules of accounting, organizations can choose to either "capitalize" their collections or not. If they capitalize their collections, they must list their value as assets on their financial statements, along with other equipment it owns, such as furniture, computers, and automobiles. Indiana Landmarks, for example, records historic structures, collection items, and business equipment "at cost upon acquisition or, if donated, at fair value as of the date of gift. . . . Historic structures and collections are reported as property held for permanent use and demonstration and are not depreciated."

Most collecting institutions do not capitalize their collections because it treats them as assets that can be used to support operations and sold to pay salaries. The Metropolitan Museum of Art states that non-

capitalization conforms with, "accounting policies generally followed by art museums" and George Washington's Mt. Vernon argues that, "the cost of the properties is not readily available... and it is impractical to assign values." Under FASB 116, an organization, "need not recognize contributions of works of art, historical treasures, and similar assets if the donated items are added to collections that meet all of the following conditions:

- a. Are held for public exhibition, education, or research in furtherance of public service rather than financial gain
- b. Are protected, kept unencumbered, cared for, and preserved
- c. Are subject to an organizational policy [such as a collections policy] that requires the *proceeds from sales of collection items to be used to acquire other items for collections.*" [emphasis added]



*Should deaccessioning funds be used to repair this?
The Trust's new policy says yes.*

If deaccessioning funds are used for preservation or direct care, the organization needs to capitalize its collections and report their value on its financial reports. A museum or historic site can choose to ignore these accounting standards, but then it would receive a "qualified audit," which could raise questions with funders and granting agencies. Nevertheless, conditions are muddy.

BDO USA, a national accounting firm, recently completed the audit of the National Trust's financial statements and found that its practices were "in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America," while at the same time noting that, "the Trust follows the accounting practice of not including in its assets the cost or appraised value of any of its

historic sites” and that “proceeds from deaccessions of collection items are designated for the replenishment or care of objects within the Museum Collection and the preservation of historic structures or historic landscape features that are part of the Historic Structures and Landscapes Collection.” Evidently, the National Trust was able to receive an unqualified audit even though it did not follow FASB rules—but they’re probably not alone. The impact of FASB 116 on collections seems to be confusing or overlooked. The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) recommends that collection policies not only follow the law, but also recognized accounting practices, so be sure to discuss the consequences of your collections management policy with your financial advisor.

Half-Baked and Not Ready to Eat

The National Trust for Historic Preservation urges historic sites and house museums to consider their buildings and landscapes as part of their collections but it turns out to be a long-accepted idea and the more significant issues of direct care and collections scope are largely unaddressed. The result is that the National Trust’s Collections Management Policy seems half-baked and needs to spend more time in the oven before it’s ready to eat. It needs to better define “direct care” for historic sites, develop its own Collections Plan for its collection of historic sites, and address the financial consequences of its policies. These are issues commonly shared with many museums and historic sites and the National Trust should continue to participate in this ongoing discussion. If the National Trust wants to advance the level of discourse, however, it may want to examine if “heritage values” should be among the criteria for collections scope and if historians and interpreters have a role in collections management. That seems to be the next topic on our shared agenda.

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News from the Educator

We are getting closer to our first session of Camp Carlyle! The July 20-24 session is nearly full with only one space left. However, there is still space available in the July 6-10 and August 3-7 sessions. You are now able to complete registration online through our Active Network page. This new system allows you to easily register for a variety of great programs and activities offered by NOVA Parks. You can access the website through this link:

<https://apm.activecommunities.com/novaparks/Home>.

The annual Hands-On-History Tent will be held Saturday May 30th from noon-3pm. This year's theme is *Savor the Flavor: The Food of the 18th Century* and will feature open hearth cooking demonstrations, ice cream making, butter making, and other hands-on activities. This event is designed for children ages 3-12 but all are welcome!



~Vanessa Herndon

News from the Curator

It has been a busy Spring with lots of exciting things happening and more interpretive changes coming soon!

-The Bible returned to storage for the months of May-September. In its place is a book on architecture by Palladio entitled "The Architecture of A. Palladio" published in London, England in 1742.

-At the end of May, I will be putting the dresses back into storage. We will have a gaming scenario in the Dining Room for the duration of the summer. Also, the new japanned tray which was acquired last fall will be incorporated into the interpretation in this room now that the busy open house season is coming to a close.

-We have just acquired a new faux tobacco twist to replace the real tobacco on display in the Study. It is best museum practice to not have any dried, once living, plant material in the house, and with new technology and the talents of Heather Hembrey of History's Table, we now have a faux version of this important and major Virginia commodity.

-The new overmantel mirror (ca. 1750-1760), which is a beautiful example of an English George II looking glass, was hung in the Parlor earlier this month. It fit perfectly beneath George Carlyle's portrait and over the fireplace. Thank you so much again to the Friends for purchasing this beautiful piece!

-The cheesecloth will be draped on the mirrors and paintings in July after we show off the mirror at the Friends' meeting in June and complete new docent training as well.



-Braddock Day and the first ever Braddock Day Symposium done in partnership with the Office of Historic Alexandria/The Lyceum, was another successful event! For the first time we had the event run all day from 10am-4pm and in spite of the rather chilly temperature had almost 400

visitors meet John Carlyle and the General and attend the presentations on this history and his Braddock Road that Sunday.

-We hope that you will join us for a special Open House event "Lafayette in Alexandria Day" on Sunday, May 31st from 1-5pm to commemorate the partnership between France and the American colonies during the Revolutionary War. There is an opening ceremony on Market Square from 1-1:30 and then Carlyle House and several historic sites around town will be open for free. We will be having re-enactors at Carlyle House all day including the Marquis de Lafayette as well as John Carlyle and his family and friends. The year will be 1780 (before Carlyle's death.) This is a kickoff event for a new computer game featuring L'Hermione, the ship that Lafayette sailed to America, and also is a prelude to the replica ship's visit which will take place June 10-12 at the Waterfront in Alexandria.

We look forward to seeing you all this summer!

Many thanks,

~Helen Wirka



Carlyle House Upcoming Events

Savor the Flavor; Food of the 18th Century Saturday, May 30; 12 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Bring your appetite for learning as you travel back in time to the 18th-century! Children and families are invited to explore the history of Colonial food through various crafts and hands-on activities, including open hearth cooking demonstrations, ice cream making, butter making, and discovering an 18th-century kitchen. There will also be a bake sale with 18th-century treats available for purchase. This event is designed for children ages 3-12 but all are welcome!

Lafayette in Alexandria Day

Sunday, May 31, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Before the French tall ship L'Hermione arrives in Alexandria, start off the celebration with free tours and Lafayette himself! The day of adventure begins on Market Square at 1 p.m. with the launch of Tides of Revolution: The Hermione Game, a virtual, web-based game providing a first-person experience of fun! Carlyle House is one of 9 participating historic sites. A shuttle will transport visitors between the sites. Lafayette will be visiting with guests at Carlyle House throughout the day.

June Summer Concerts

Thursday, June 4 and June 18; 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

June is African-American Music Appreciation month, and Carlyle House and Alexandria's Black History Museum will be co-hosting talented local artists to celebrate the roots of this music! Join us for two concerts on the Magnolia Terrace in the gardens of Carlyle House for "A Jazzy June!" The Sandra Y. Johnson Sextet performs June 4; DuPont Brass performs June 18.

Camp Carlyle

There are still a few openings available for our fun and popular summer camp. Please call or check our website for full information.

Please give us a call or check our website for more details on our happenings.

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*Carlyle House Historic Park is accredited by
the American Alliance of Museums.*

News from the Site Director

This issue's feature article critiques the National Trust for Historic Preservation's controversial new collections policy, a hot topic in the house museum world. As the Friends of Carlyle House work so hard to fund and maintain the museum's collections, the topic should be of great interest to the membership. The author, Max van Balgooy, is the President of Engaging Places, a former Council member of the American Association for State and Local History, and an adjunct professor in the Museum Studies Program at George Washington University. Max uses Carlyle House as a case study in his GWU historic site interpretation class. I first met Max years ago, when he was the Director of Interpretation and Education at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Here is a link to his blog, if you'd like to have deeper insight into the museum world: <http://engagingplaces.net/>.



Thank you, Becky and Bartlett Tree Experts!

Surely you have noticed how beautiful our garden is year after year. I'd like to thank our gardener, Becky Super, who works full time as the Director of another historic house museum, yet somehow finds the time and energy to keep the Carlyle House garden looking fantastic. Kudos to Becky and her volunteers! If you'd like to join her team, please let me know. I'd also like to thank Bartlett Tree Experts, the firm that has cared for our trees since at least 2008. They do a fantastic job. Other partners who keep our landscape beautiful include Smoot, who keeps the grass neatly trimmed, and GreenHawk, who ensures that our lawns remain healthy, green, and weed free.

Follow Carlyle House on Facebook to keep up to date on all of the fun happenings here. In the past two months, we've hosted a visit from the Irish Prime Minister, as well as Hoda Kotb from the Today Show, who filmed an interview in the garden. We never know who will visit next!

I am very proud to announce that our parent organization, Nova Parks, awarded Vanessa Herndon a 2015 Employee Achievement Award for excellence in programming. To quote Executive Director Paul Gilbert, "Thanks to Vanessa's fresh eye and inventive approach, the stories of the Carlyle House live on through dynamic programs." Please join me in congratulating Vanessa on this well-deserved and important honor.

Finally, don't miss the Friends Annual Meeting June 12 on the lovely Magnolia Terrace. We begin with a brief business meeting at 6:00, and adjourn to a delightful reception. We hope to see you there!

~Susan Hellman

Carlyle House Historic Park

A property of the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

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