

Acquisition Methods for Museum objects

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Any object small or big, rare or common, which takes a place in the museum, qualifies itself as a museum object. The collection / acquisition policy of a museum rests upon the scope and must be determined by its primary nature and its secondary limitation. The primary nature is the specialization of the museum. The secondary limitation, which a museum will fix for its collection, is a geographical boundary or a political division, which it stands for. When the scope of acquisition is once established it is the duty of the head of the institution to go on by the guidelines fixed for the collection.

The basic methods of acquisition are: purchase, gift (including bequest), exchange and field collection. The first three of these are legal transactions. The fourth has legal ramifications. All of them have the effect of acquiring the title in the object for the museum. Whenever the museum acquires an object it undertakes a bundle of obligations including storage, maintenance, conservation, insurance, security, documentation. Each of these adds to the demand on the museum's resources and it accordingly essential that the museum develop acquisition procedures that are considered and carefully articulated. Attention given to acquisition procedures is essential to good governance of the collection. As the collection is the core of any museum, so those responsible for the acquisition of material must ensure that the methods of acquisition adopted, protect the widest interests of the museum. Irrespective of the method of acquisition one must consider (a) the relevance of the item to the institution's collection policy, (b) the ethics of the acquisition, and (c) assurance as to title and provenance. Once it has been determined that the material is appropriate, the issue is how to achieve that end. Where the acquisition is by means of purchase, gift (including bequest), exchange, the narrow legal issue is whether the parties have concluded a clear, unambiguous and enforceable agreement. The technical legal issues are sometimes the easiest to satisfy.

Methods of Collection:

Acquiring objects for a museum is the foremost task of a museum to establish it. There are many ways of collection of museum objects. The methods also vary from museum to museum. Field collection, excavation, treasure-troves, donations, gifts and bequests, purchase, loan, exchange, confiscation, transfer, repatriation etc., are some of the common methods of acquisition of objects for a museum.

Field Collection:

Field collection is very important in the sense that the locality of the object is known. The archaeology departments or the anthropological departments are making area survey. Surface collection is made in most of the areas. Soon after a good rain will reveal many objects such as coins, beads and sherds.

An anthropologist surveys tribal area and collects objects. A zoologist collects zoological collections from seashore and forests. He used to get license from the government to catch some birds, animals, marine objects and stuff them for display. A botanist collects specimens from forest area and preserves them to display. A geologist collects minerals, rocks, slags, fossils etc., as surface collection from different areas. Depending upon the interest the collection increases through field collection. Archaeological collections such as sculptures, stone inscriptions can be collected only by government museums, as the permission has to be got from the Collector of the district. A group of students may be taken to the field and collection can be made. The students may be taken around sites, which are rich in the ancient materials to collect them. It is the experience of the author who organized many trips to excavation-sites, monuments, ancient habitation sites, riverbeds etc., and has enriched the museum collection in many ways. The loose finds of archaeological objects are brought to the knowledge of the Collector of the district concerned and sought his permission to allot them to the museum to preserve them.

Excavations:

Excavation is a scientific method of revealing the buried objects under earth. Excavation is one of the methods of acquisition of ancient objects in the museums. Some museums are empowered by the Government of India to undertake excavation if they have qualified archaeologist and add the objects thus obtained in the collection of the museum. Archaeological excavation means any research aimed at the discovery of objects of archaeological character, whether such research involves digging of the ground or systematic exploration of its surface or is carried out on the bed or in the subsoil of inland or territorial waters of a member State. The Member State can adopt the most appropriate measure to protect the excavated cultural

Heritage. Each member State should ensure the protection of its archaeological heritage, taking fully into account problems arising in connection with excavations and in conformity with the provisions of the present recommendation.

Treasure-trove:

According to the Indian Treasure-trove Act, 1878, buried objects when exposed from the ground belong to the Government. These objects when exposed accidentally they are brought to the knowledge of the Collector of the district. The Collector informs the head of the department of museums and if he requires the objects, the treasure-trove objects are sent to the museum for examination. Compensation is given to the person who found out the treasure as well as the owner of the land. Such facilities are available only to the government museums. The Government Museum, Chennai is augmenting its collection by the Treasure-trove objects. The important additions to the bronze collection are the Buddhist sculptures from Nagappattinam, Velankanni Nataraja etc.

Donations:

Many museums are brought into existence by generous collectors who have decided to give their private collections to the community. Many more museums are able to enhance their collections thanks to donations. At a time in which acquisition funds are limited, many museums have to develop their donor programs if their collections are to grow in size and quality. In spite of the importance of donations, many administrators do not go about the acceptance of donations in a legally safe manner. As discussed above, there are three matters that should be considered:

- the power to accept donations;
- the means used to secure legal ownership of the material.
- whether the museum really wants the gift.

Gifts and Bequests:

In the European countries the individuals made the collections and they were later gifted to the museums. The British Museum came into existence by the bequest of Sir Hans Sloane. Fitz William Museum was born by the bequest of the Count Fitz William of Cambridgeshire. In England art pieces and antiquities are accepted it may not be possible to fulfill the wishes of the donors. It is difficult for any progressive museum to fulfill the desire of the donor to exhibit all his material at one place or to keep it on display at all times. Only valuable gifts no restrictions should be encouraged. Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad is a museum established out of the collection of Salar Jung III and the gifts from well wishers and art collectors of the area. In Tamil

Nadu many gifts are received from local supporters and benefactors to the museums. The author has collected many objects through gifts by his personal requests through the media. He also organized many meetings with the help of the District Collector at the head quarters of the divisions of the districts and many objects were received as gifts. Some organizations also collect objects and give them as gifts. Prof. K.A. Thirugnanasampandam, Erode, Erode district and many others gave coin collections to the Government Museum, Erode and Vellore.

Purchase of Objects:

Museums enrich their collections by purchase. Especially, museums other than government museums collect objects through purchase. Every museum allocates funds for the purchase of museum objects. Small museums purchase objects as and when objects come for sale. The Curator purchases objects of the interest of the museum when he undertakes tour to different places. But, larger museums cannot do mainly like this. Even in Chennai Government Museum, when Dr. N. Devasahayam, our then Curator for Anthropology undertook tour to tribal areas he used to collect objects through purchase from the Tribals at very nominal rates. It is the duty of the museum to set up Objects Purchase Committee or Art Purchase Committee to select good pieces according to the policy and programme of the museum and make the purchase at reasonable charges. The Committee consists of experts in the field. Any object before it is brought into museum collection, the opinion of the expert in the field should be sought for the genuineness and proposed value of the specimen. Whenever objects are selected it should be kept in mind that the object is interesting and representative of the region or specialty. The committee or the Curator must examine the registration certificates issued by Registering officers in the districts. Before making the final payment, attempts also may be made to verify the source of the objects. If necessary records of theft are available with the Police, Central Bureau of Investigation and Archaeological Survey of India they may be verified.

Loan of Museum Objects:

Museums often receive objects both short-term and long-term or permanent loan for a fixed period or indefinite period. The borrowing institutions have to maintain the objects in good-condition and send an annual report on the condition of the objects. The borrowing institutions also inspect the condition of the objects loaned by its officers. The objects on short-term loan are for specific purpose such as special exhibitions or touring exhibitions. Some objects are loaned to other institutions on long term loan, say for 99 years. In Government Museums the loan is given only getting necessary permission from the Government concerned.

Some of the cannons in the Fort Museum, Chennai are from the Government Museum, Chennai on loan basis. Two cannons at the Government Museum, Veil ore are from the Archaeological Survey of India on loan basis. The ICOM adopted the guidelines in 1973 towards loan of museum objects to other institutions etc.

Exchange of Objects:

Exchange of museum objects is the most rational way of obtaining new exhibits for museums without much expense. Duplicates and triplicates should be exchanged with such items, which are un-represented in the museums. This was in vogue in the earlier times and this practice is slowly dwindled down, The botanical herbaria were sent from Government Museum, Chennai to foreign museums and intern exchanges were made. Exchange of museum objects will cut the budget, will add national character, to compare the objects of different regions or countries. The exchanges initiated by the National Museum, New Delhi with other museums in India and abroad have yielded very encouraging results. Museums at Chandigarh, Baroda, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and USA have exchanged objects.