

Museum Collections Storage Areas Project

Many who have volunteered time or visited the Ford-MacNichol Home may be aware of the various nooks and crannies which serve as storage for our artifacts, archives and event or display items. A city as historic as Wyandotte is bound to produce collection items that number into the thousands. It is behind the walls of two of the buildings that are part of its Museum Campus, the Ford-MacNichol Home and Burns Home, where these pieces are housed. Unfortunately, not every space is as organized as others and knowing exactly what is in these areas is an ongoing process the City of Wyandotte Museum staff (along with staffs of many similar institutions) aim to get a better handle on.

There is an area in the basement of the Ford-MacNichol Home which houses a large portion of the collections of the City of Wyandotte's Museum. In this space, one may find any number of items including trunks, model ships, radios, tools, bricks and other architectural pieces. Each item was brought out of the space and staff made an initial assessment as to how to move forward. This is all in an ongoing process to decide which items may be kept in the collection or deaccessioned.

As one can imagine, this is an event that takes a lot of time and thought. Museums hold items in the public trust for which they serve. We care about the items that are donated to us and appreciate the people and stories that go along with them. Museums strive to maintain the confidence of the people by educating them and being transparent about their processes at the same time. At their core, museums are bodies which adhere to a mission, much like other institutions, companies and organizations. Our mission is:

"The Wyandotte Museum is dedicated to inspiring and fostering public awareness, interest, understanding and appreciation of the unique history of the City of Wyandotte and its relationship to the Downriver region. The Museum preserves our mutual heritage through its historic buildings collections, archives, publications, exhibits, programs and special events using our shared past as a foundation of the future."

While the mission of the City of Wyandotte Museum has not changed in many years, the items in the collections which tell our story may have. But, what does this mean exactly? First and foremost, this project is part of an ongoing process that is integral to the overall collections of the City of Wyandotte Museum. Through this event, staff seeks to get a better handle on these items in order to ensure future exhibits are more fruitful, research requests are more easily and concisely conducted, and spaces are safer and more harmonious and organized. The act of handling each individual item and taking it from its current spot to assess it, is important as it helps staff consider the collection piece and its place in our mission and the overall stories we would like to tell. As collections evolve so do the museums which house them. Over time, many of the pieces in the collections may no longer fit our mission for a bevy of reasons, which may include:

- Relevance – Many items that have been collected over time may not actually be relevant to Wyandotte or the area in general. As museums evolve, so does the museum world. In the past, collecting practices have not always been as formal or well-disciplined as they are in the present. As a result, many institutions are tasked with the deaccession process.

- Condition – Some items may have become damaged during storage or may have come to us in disrepair. This could be due to a number of reasons which, again, may be due in part to the evolution of museum and preservation practices.
- Duplication – Museums struggle with having many of the same or similar items in their collections, which inhibit the accession of further items as a result.

So, what sort of items have we come across? Below are a few of the more interesting pieces that have been found in the Wyandotte Museums' collection.

- A marble cross which would have adorned the top of a cemetery headstone
- An upper plate to a pair of false teeth
- A chair belonging to the Hurst Family, whose grand home resided next to the Bacon Library
- A glass walking cane which belonged to J.D. Haven, proprietor of the Wyandotte Herald
- A pair of skis
- An eye examination chair which once resided in the office of Dr. James M. LaBerge
- Three stained glass windows from the First Presbyterian Church of Wyandotte
- A camera used by the Wyandotte Police to take mugshots
- Card table with local businesses advertised on the tabletop

When looking at the photographs note items to be placed back in the area, have yet to be resituated.



BEFORE



AFTER

Items which may be deaccessioned will be placed in a holding area during each subsequent step, which has been set forth by the City of Wyandotte in the deaccession policy. These steps are:

- Research each item and its correlating donation and accession paperwork to ensure proper procedure. If the piece is to be deaccessioned:
 - Detail on a document and photograph item;
 - Pull accession information and copy to attach to document.
- Present items to the Archives & Inventory committee, part of the Cultural and Historical Commission of the City of Wyandotte.

- Present items to the entire body of the Cultural and Historical Commission of the City of Wyandotte.

It is important the public understands the Wyandotte Museums staff and volunteers greatly appreciate all of the pieces it receives from its generous donors. Without all of you, we would not have the robust collection of important pieces with which to tell our story, present our history and relay tales of the wonderful people who made Wyandotte what it is today. While not an easy task, due to the decisions that may need to be made, it is a necessary task all museums face throughout their lifetimes to remain connected to their mission and continue to tell the stories important to the community and history. In fact, the following bullet points are taken directly from the American Alliance of Museums' Code of Ethics.

- Acquisition, disposal and loan activities are conducted in a manner that respects the protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources and discourages illicit trade in such materials.
- Acquisition, disposal and loan activities conform to its mission and public trust responsibilities.
- Disposal of collections through sale, trade or research activities is solely for the advancement of the museum's mission.

We conduct this process ethically and adhere to the deaccession policy created and set forth by the City of Wyandotte. We continually educate all possible donors at the time they make the decision to bequeath their family heirloom, childhood remembrance or piece they found. In this way, we are transparent and they can make the best, informed decision, they can.

This project has really been a labor of love so far and staff and volunteers are eager to move forward. We have started on our second space, which is the attic gallery storage space in the Ford-MacNichol Home, behind the southeast wall. From there, we will move on to other locales in the Home and are excited to see the end result which will be three to five organized spaces, which may also include a future exhibit area.

To find out more about the museum collections storage areas project or if you are interested in helping out, contact museum staff at (734) 324-7284 or museum@wyandottemi.gov.

If you or anyone you know has questions about the collections policies of the City of Wyandotte or would like further clarification or information about this project, please contact museum staff directly. We will be more than happy to provide you with anything you may need or to meet with you in person, if you'd like. You may also stop by the Ford-MacNichol Home at 2610 Biddle Avenue, on Saturday, March 24, from 2:00pm-4:00pm to see the spaces and the items that have been rediscovered. Make sure to leave a little room for some light refreshments.

Thank you to all of the volunteers who have helped thus far and to the Wyandotte Cultural and Historical Commission for their help as well as current and future guidance.

-Jesse Rose, Museum Director

Citations

American Alliance of Museums. *AAM Code of Ethics for Museums*. <https://www.aamus.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/code-of-ethics-for-museums/>