

NIH Policy Manual

1187 - Identification, Care, and Disposition of Historic Objects

Issuing Office: OD/OCPL **Phone:** [\(301\) 496-6610](tel:3014966610)

Approving Official(s): DDM

Release Date: 5/03/1994 ? **Technical Revision Date:** 4/04/2025 ?

Transmittal Notice

1. **Explanation of Material Transmitted:** This chapter explains procedures for handling objects having historic value.
2. **Filing Instructions:**
 - Remove:** None.
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3. **Distribution:**
 - NIH Mailing Keys F-401 and F-402

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A. Purpose

This policy permits the NIH Historian and Director, DeWitt Stetten, Jr., Museum of Medical Research to designate selected objects as having historic value to the agency. This policy provides the Stetten Museum with the responsibility to accession and monitor objects so designated in order to protect them from damage, defacement, or destruction.

B. Background

The DeWitt Stetten, Jr., Museum of Medical Research was formally established in October, 1986. The Museum, which also serves as the NIH Historical Office, collects and exhibits twentieth century biomedical research instruments, technologies, and memorabilia, especially those relating to the National Institutes of Health. Museum exhibits seek to educate the public about the process of twentieth century biomedical research and its achievements, generally focusing on the research of NIH investigators as case studies. The Museum was established

by the Director, NIH, as an official activity of the agency with authority to receive donated artifacts, documents and other historical materials. Budgetary and operational responsibilities for the Museum have been delegated to the NIH Office of Communications, advised by the Museum Advisory Committee.

Past efforts to locate historic objects have shown that many objects of historic value to the agency have been lost, misplaced, destroyed or abandoned. This policy acknowledges that certain objects are important physical symbols of the history of NIH and its accomplishments. It recognizes that the NIH honors the commitment and dedication of those who preceded us and that preserving our material history can help to foster an appreciation of our mission and accomplishments in improving the health of our citizens.

In October 1993 the Acting Director, NIH, made the DeWitt Stetten Jr., Museum of Medical Research responsible for identifying, accessioning and taking suitable steps to insure the preservation and appropriate use of items having historic value.

This policy does not infringe on the right of any organization to maintain possession of historic objects so long as they are cared for and used in a non-destructive manner and displayed with appropriate decorum.

C. Policy

The NIH Historian and Director, DeWitt Stetten, Jr., Museum of Medical Research is authorized to designate specific NIH objects as having historic value to the agency. Once identified as historic objects, such items will be cataloged and, when possible, marked with a museum number and identity label. Objects will remain in the possession of their current custodians as long as they are well- maintained and used in a manner appropriate to their historic significance.

D. Reference

Action Memorandum to: Dr. Ruth L. Kirschstein, Acting Director, NIH, *from:* Acting Associate Director for Communications; *subject:* NIH policy regarding historic memorabilia; dated September 20, 1993.

E. Definitions

1. **Historic objects** - Examples of such items include but are not limited to: busts, statues, paintings, single or group photographic portraits, exhibits, architectural models, plaques, gifts to the agency, trophies, ribbons, ceremonial certificates, commemorative furniture, cornerstones, and time-capsules and their contents, archaeological artifacts and other physical artifacts as identified by the Museum as having historic value.
2. **Approving Official** - The Associate Director for Communications
3. **Concurring Official** - The NIH Historian and Director, DeWitt Stetten, Jr., Museum of Medical Research.

4. **Issuing Office** - The DeWitt Stetten, Jr., Museum of Medical Research and the NIH Historical Office
5. **Reviewing Office** - Office of Research Services, Security Operations

F. Responsibilities

1. **The Office of Communications** provides direct supervision to the staff of the NIH Historical Office and Stetten Museum.
2. **The Stetten Museum Advisory Committee** advises the Director, NIH, through the Associate Director for Communications regarding operating policies of the Museum and the appointment of the Curator. The Museum Advisory Committee also may advise on activities of the NIH Historical Office as is considered appropriate.

The following are members of the advisory committee ex officio: Associate Director for Communications Director, Clinical Center Director, National Center for Research Resources Director, National Library of Medicine Historian, U.S. Public Health Service Representative, NIH Office of Intramural Research.

Six additional members are appointed by the Director NIH. These members are Federal personnel chosen for their interest, expertise and commitment to the Museum. The majority of appointed members are drawn from membership of the intramural science community of NIH. Each member is appointed to serve for a three year term beginning on the first day of the fiscal year, except that the first class of appointed members will serve terms as follows: two for one year, two for two years, and two for regular three year terms.

The Committee may request and use the services of consultants. The Chairperson of the Museum Advisory Committee is designated by the Director, NIH. The Museum Curator will serve as non-voting executive secretary of the Advisory Committee

3. **DeWitt Stetten, Jr., Museum of Medical Research and NIH Historical Office:** Develops and implements the policies concerning the identification, care and disposition of historic objects.

G. Procedures

1. **Objects are identified as having historic value in one of two ways:** 1) the NIH Historian and Director, DeWitt Stetten, Jr., Museum of Medical Research identifies an object and declares it to be of historic significance, or 2) someone outside Stetten Museum of Medical Research proposes that an object has historic significance. In the second case, the Stetten Museum Director will make a determination and will notify in writing the individual making the proposal.
2. Once an object is declared as being of historic worth it will be accessioned as a Museum object, and a catalog number will be assigned to the object. In some cases, an accession form will also be issued to the custodian to collect background information about the object (see Appendix 1, preliminary accession information form).

3. A memorandum will be forwarded to the current custodian of the object, informing that individual that the object has been designated as historic.
4. The memorandum will explain that the object needs to be preserved and not damaged, destroyed, defaced or used for frivolous purposes.
5. Where possible, in addition to the catalog number, the Museum will affix a permanent indelible marker to the object. This marker will identify the object as a historic object and will contain information on proper disposition of the object.
6. As long as historic objects are being used and are safe in their current settings, no other action will be taken other than cataloging.
7. When the object is no longer being used, the custodian will notify the Museum by calling 496-6610. Museum officials will arrange to have the object transferred to a Museum storage area.

See paper copy for Appendix 1.