



BERKSHIRE ATHENAEUM

1 WENDELL AVENUE • PITTSFIELD, MA 01201-6385

Pittsfield's Public Library Since 1872

LOCAL HISTORY DEPARTMENT: COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICY STATEMENT

The Berkshire Athenaeum exists to initiate, nurture and feed a passion for knowledge and learning, and as one of its primary goals, “people from around the world will be provided the resources to explore personal, historical and cultural heritage, including the works of notable Berkshire authors.” The Athenaeum achieves this goal primarily through the efforts of its Local History Department.

1. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE COLLECTIONS:

Final authority for the determination of the policies in this document are vested in the Athenaeum's Board of Trustees. They have delegated the responsibility for implementing this policy to the Library Director, who in turn delegates to the Supervisor of Local History the responsibility for selection of materials in the special areas of this department. The recommendations of this supervisor are always subject to review by the Director.

It is the responsibility of the Director and the Board to see that this policy is updated should new collecting areas be added or should priorities for the collection be revised.

It is the function of librarians to select and to withdraw library materials, and to advise on their use. They are qualified through training and expertise, however they must of necessity work within the limitations of space and budget. Recognizing that sensitivity to the needs and interests of the community is essential to the development of library collections, the Athenaeum welcomes advice and suggestions from patrons, trustees and authorities in various fields. Librarians, however, are responsible for judging the needs of their collection and their community, and they must make the final choices.

2. PURPOSE OF THE LOCAL HISTORY DEPARTMENT COLLECTIONS:

The collections housed in the Local History Department of the Berkshire Athenaeum are part of the heritage of Pittsfield and are not to be viewed as capital for reinvestment. The materials themselves and/or the subject areas they represent have permanent value to the community and are made available to the general public on a limited basis for serious research on local, genealogical and/or historical issues.

The historical and informational value of the items in the Local History Department is more important than visual appeal. The materials in these collections are intended for research and therefore do not circulate to the public. Preservation efforts, while attempting to conform to accepted conservation practice, will be undertaken so as not to restrict public access to the informational value of the item.

3. NATURE OF THE COLLECTION:

The Local History Department collections may contain items in a variety of media formats of historical interest to the City of Pittsfield and its residents past, present, and future. The primary focus of these collections is the creation and preservation of a permanent record of

important events, groups and personalities of the City of Pittsfield, which may be recorded in materials of a regional focus. Given the abundance of well endowed special collections in the Massachusetts area, the Berkshire Athenaeum will not attempt to provide the type of extensive research collection readily available elsewhere, however the value of this collection lies in its depth, breadth and scope as a comprehensive survey of Berkshire County history with Pittsfield at its hub.

With close to 4,700 square feet, the department is located at the east end of the main floor of the Athenaeum, with additional closed-stack and microfilm storage spaces located on the lower floor.

The Local History Collection takes the greatest amount of space in the main room one first enters in the department (the Thomas Allen Room) and provides historical and genealogical information primarily about the Berkshires and the greater Berkshire area, but may also consider a wider geographic area including New England, eastern New York State, and southeastern Canada to provide a broader perspective of where many Berkshire families came from. Included in the collection, located in a locked aisle, are books from the library of Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, a notable Berkshire author.

A large, climate controlled, walk-in vault stores the library's most valuable or irreplaceable materials and realia¹, a small collection of rare print and manuscript materials related to the Shaker community on the outskirts of Pittsfield, and essential electronic back-ups of scanned materials on portable hard drives or DVDs.

Local History Department servers are housed in the Local History Office. The servers store all electronic databases and scanned documents produced or acquired by the Athenaeum and creates the intranet used to deliver access to these materials.

The Herman Melville Memorial Room houses a collection of the works, family papers, portraits, photographs, prints and artifacts of Herman Melville, plus a significant research collection about the author.

The Berkshire Authors Room houses a browsable collection of books and other materials by and about authors with a connection to the Berkshires.

The Local History Department storage room located on the basement level has 1,800 linear feet of shelf space housing an overflow collection of historical materials less in demand by the public, or replacement copies of highly used materials. The adjacent 900 square foot storage room houses an extensive collection of microfilm, approximately 70,000 reels, largely donated to the Athenaeum by the National Archives and Records Administration in 2011.

4. SCOPE OF THE COLLECTIONS:

Local History Department collections consist primarily of printed books, but newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, maps, manuscripts, photographs, portraits, realia, prints, microformats, electronic databases and other special forms of publication may also be included and are henceforth referred to as "materials."

Duplicate copies of Local History Department items may be available other Athenaeum collections depending on the material and needs of the library users.

¹The term realia refers to three-dimensional objects from real life such as coins, tools, artifacts and textiles, that do not easily fit into the orderly categories of printed material.

5. PRIMARY AREAS OF COLLECTING:

An active effort is made to add to the recognized strengths of the collections in the Local History Departments. The Supervisor of Local History solicits gifts, searches the library's reference and circulating collections for transfers, consults with dealers, and examines publishers catalogs and review media for the purchase or acquisition of the following types of material:

- Materials that record the history, development, and the current state of affairs of the City of Pittsfield and the greater Berkshire area. Images of both Berkshire sites and individuals are an important part of this collection.
- Materials that record the history and ancestry of Berkshire families.
- Materials that record the cultural heritage of past and present ethnic and religious groups in the community, especially materials on the Shakers.
- Materials that contribute to a better understanding of the area geography, demographics and architecture.
- Materials by and about Herman Melville and his family.
- Materials written by or attributed to local authors, fictional works set in the Berkshires, and some critical and biographical works of the area's major literary figures.
- Materials (primarily scores, not simply lyrics or chord symbols) written by or attributed to local composers, and some critical and biographical works of the area's major composers.
- Materials that provide instruction relating to genealogy, local history, preservation, oral history and similar topics.

Any materials deemed by the Library Director and/or Trustees to enhance the collections of the Local History Department or to enlarge its scope in a coherent way may be added to the collection, regardless of whether or not it falls into a category listed above or below.

Acceptance of additions to the permanent collections shall be made on the following conditions:

- Consistency with the library's mission and the purpose of the Local History Department;
- Authority, authenticity and reliability;
- Educational, interpretive, and/or exhibit value;
- Adequacy of documentation;
- Intrinsic value possessing relative beauty, rarity, uniqueness, association with important events or individuals, age and acceptable condition;
- Clear title available from the source of acquisition;
- Ability of the library to care properly for and use the acquisition;
- Price.

In selecting materials for purchase or accepting donations, the library shall be cognizant of the space limitations inherent in the Local History Department, the potential usefulness of the item, and the suitability of the material in the Athenaeum as opposed to other area collections. The Library, in accepting donated materials for placement in the Department, does so with the understanding that the donated materials will be a long-term asset to the Department's collections, and as such the library agrees to maintain the items for at least ten years.

6. LIMITATIONS ON THE ADDITION OF MATERIALS:

Gifts to the Athenaeum are evaluated under the same conditions as purchased materials (see GIFT POLICY & PROCEDURES). The Library Director and the Board of Trustees may decline to accept for the Local History Department any gift of material that seems inappropriate to the collections or that would be more appropriate in another repository. In such cases, the would-be donor should be informed of the scope of the Local History Department collections and, if possible, put in touch with an institution that might wish to accept the offered gift.

The Athenaeum's justifications for not accepting gifts may include, but not necessarily be limited to the following:

- Outside the library's scope;
- Deteriorated or lacking in physical integrity;
- Cannot be preserved;
- Inauthentic;
- Duplicate;
- Irrelevant;
- Of doubtful future use to the library.

Condition often forms an important criterion in determining whether or not to accept a gift for the Local History Department. If material is in such poor condition that its storage and use would be difficult, and if the cost of restoration by a qualified restorer is beyond the Library's budget, the potential donor should be encouraged to include as part of the gift the sum necessary to restore it to usable condition. Volumes in poor condition to be transferred from the library's open stacks should be sent out for restoration before their addition to the collection.

As already noted, the limited shelving space in the Local History Department is a consideration in adding volumes to the collection. The Library Director and Trustees may find it necessary to decline a large gift of material of a kind actively included in the collection should there be insufficient shelving or space to accommodate it. If the decision is made to accept a gift that cannot be housed in the Local History Department under existing conditions, funding to purchase shelving could either be solicited from the donor of the materials or appropriated from the discretionary funds of the Library Trustees. With the exception of the two storage areas on the lower level described above in Section 3, the long-term storage of unique local history or genealogical material outside of the Local History Department is to be avoided. Similarly, the lack of staffing to process a sizeable addition to the Local History Department collections may also determine whether or not a gift is accepted. If it is desirable to accept a substantial gift that cannot be promptly cataloged by regular library personnel, or if there is no staff member who can prepare adequate cataloging, the wherewithal to hire a qualified cataloger should be sought from the donor or taken from other library funds.

Donors should be informed that library staff cannot be expected to provide an appraisal of donated material. The usual procedure is for the donor to pay for any appraisal desired.

Gifts of collections accepted by the Athenaeum may not be retained as a whole, but may be divided, with some items put into the Local History collections, and remaining items sold or otherwise offered to a more appropriate repository.

7. DEED OF GIFT

The deed of gift is a fundamental document for the Berkshire Athenaeum, an agreement between a donor and the library that transfers legal ownership of major records/objects. The deed of gift is the record of how a collection came into the possession of the Athenaeum, showing its provenance, and is kept on file permanently as proof of ownership. The document should include:

- Contact information for the donor;
- Description of the items being transferred;
- Indication that the copyright is being transferred if the materials are copyrighted;
- Explanation of any restrictions placed on the use/display of the items;
- Provisions for how to deal with unwanted materials;
- Provisions for the donor;
- Details of future acquisitions from the donor.

8. WEEDING THE COLLECTIONS

In keeping with the purpose, nature and scope of the Local History Collection of the Berkshire Athenaeum as defined herein, weeding of these collections does not follow the same guidelines as those set out for the Circulating and General Reference collections. The collections housed in the Local History Department are part of the heritage of Pittsfield and as such, have more permanent historic and cultural value.

However, considerations of physical space limitations combined with the need to add new materials to the collections, make it imperative that the composition of the collections be reevaluated periodically. Simultaneously, the changing nature of technology, advances in archival preservation practices and availability of previously scarce materials in reprint, digital or micro format are changing the range of options available to special collections librarians in managing their collections.

8.1 WEEDING CRITERIA

The first consideration in applying a weeding policy to these collections is the recognition of three distinct categories of materials and the nature of each category. These categories can be defined as follows:

8.1.a. Permanent Intrinsic Value: Items and collections that have permanent intrinsic value, including such individual items as:

- First editions of local histories, biographies & fictional works by local authors;
- Items signed by, or from the collections of, prominent local residents;
- Original documents, pamphlets, maps and manuscripts;
- Original photographs, portraits and other images;
- Other materials deemed to be of a similar nature.

All items of permanent intrinsic value are valuable to the cultural heritage of Pittsfield in and of themselves. These materials should be preserved and permanently retained.

8.1.b. Permanent Informational Value: Other materials in the collections are of permanent value for their informational content, but are not intrinsically valuable. Items that fall into this category are candidates for replacement and/or reformatting should the condition of the material or space considerations make it desirable to do so. Informational value can be

preserved by replacing items in poor condition with reprints or micro formats. Space consuming series and finding aids can be replaced with digital or micro formats as they become available, although digital versions of materials with permanent informational value should not be the only medium retained.

- 8.1.c. Temporary Informational Value: Time sensitive materials, current informational reference sources, how-to books of a technological nature and some periodicals have a finite period of usefulness. Items that fall into this category should be routinely evaluated and removed or replaced as appropriate.

8.2 FREQUENCY OF WEEDING

As with the other collections of the library, weeding should not be a major project undertaken every several years or when there is no longer room to shelve the materials. The collection as a whole should be reviewed periodically, keeping in mind the purpose, nature and scope of the collections as outlined in the sections above. Based on the weeding criteria described in section 7.1 above, some areas of the collection will require more frequent review than others depending upon the category into which they fall.

- 8.2.a. Permanent Intrinsic Value: Little or no weeding of materials that fall into this category is to be expected.
- 8.2.b. Permanent Informational Value: Management of materials in this category is an ongoing process within the department, driven primarily by condition of the material, availability of replacements (in some format) and space availability.
- 8.2.c. Temporary Informational Value: Systematic review of materials in this category should be conducted on an ongoing and rotating basis, with all areas of the collection receiving attention every two years.

8.3 DISPOSAL

Most materials withdrawn from the collections of the Local History Department are sold through the periodic book sales of the Berkshire Family History Association. Proceeds of these sales are used by the library for funding the cost of rebinding other materials or for the purchase of microfilmed materials. If rare, valuable items are for some reason withdrawn, they are sold with the assistance of a rare book dealer.