



Smithsonian
Anacostia Community Museum

Anacostia Community Museum Collecting Plan – March 2013

I. Museum Mission

The Anacostia Community Museum was founded upon the principles of direct engagement with and responsibility to the community in which it was established; the museum mission centers upon on developing exhibitions that discuss community issues and concerns.

The museum was founded within a residential, low- and mixed-income, largely African American community. From its inception, museum publications, exhibitions, and public programs focused on community history (and later, African American history), and on grappling with socio-cultural issues that resonate within urban communities. The museum's mission has always identified the museum as a community-focused institution.

The museum's new mission *is to challenge perceptions, broaden perspectives, generate new knowledge, and deepen understanding about the ever-changing concepts and realities of 'community.'* It requires that the museum expand its scope from one that was ethnically specific to one focused on documenting and interpreting the impact of contemporary social and cultural issues on urban communities.

II. History of Collections

The ACM collections plan grows out of the museum's work in community history, from staff efforts to document the neighborhoods in wards seven and eight that lie east of the Anacostia River immediately surrounding the museum (EOR communities), and also draws upon the strong collection of community-focused materials within the museum's permanent collection.

The museum's collecting activity evolved through several distinct phases. The first phase in the development of the museum's collection began almost immediately after opening in 1967. Museum staff had no authority to develop a permanent collection, but an informal collection of artifacts began to accumulate at once, and were kept in a locked storage cabinet. There were a large number of artifacts to which the museum gained title inadvertently, i.e., as a result of people who left objects with no prior notice or warning, or mailed without adequate return addresses or contact information. There was no designated registrar or collections staff, no climate controlled storage space, and little professional records-keeping.

The second phase in the development of the museum's collections began in 1987 when staff and offices were moved to Fort Place from the Martin Luther King Avenue location. There was a separate and secured storage room for the artifacts, but no staff, no collections management

policy or formal system of organization other than a simple list and a file of index cards; and there was no climate controlled storage area. The collection kept growing in size however, as the museum was then the Smithsonian Institution's only museum devoted to African American history and culture.

In 1990 a bally box was installed, creating climate controlled conditions for collections, but it was not until 1992 that museum authorities were allowed to hire the museum's first registrar, develop a collections management policy, and formally develop a permanent collection. Because of the informal manner in which the initial artifacts had accumulated, the museum had a significant number of artifacts with little documentation, little provenance, and no clear title. The significance of these early artifacts was often not sufficiently recorded; and some of it was lost when the museum's first historian/curator, Louise Hutchinson, retired at the end of the 1980s.

In 2000, after completing an \$8 million renovation of the facility, the museum's capacity to care and provide storage for collections was improved. An initial inventory of the entire collection was undertaken. In order to enhance storage conditions, accessibility, and physical control, holdings in the permanent collection were separated and diverted into an archives section (paper documents, photographs, film, and video collections); and an objects section (three-dimensional artifacts). The Museum's Collection Committee convened to review all holdings with the purpose of recommending retention or deaccession. Well over half of the museum's holdings were recommended for deaccession (reasons most cited include "lack of museum quality," "exhibit prop," and "not useful for exhibition, research or educational purposes"). Most of the objects slated for deaccession are of little value, being primarily exhibit props and items purchased commercially which had been improperly accessioned.

In 2002-2003 contractual archivists were hired to complete initial processing of the special collections and documents held in the museum's archives; a long term plan for the archives was developed in consultation with museum staff. Collections staff continue to work towards the realization of the archives development plan.

In 2002 a collections information program, Willoughby Associates' *iO*, was purchased and installed at the museum, and a contractor engaged to enter collections data under the direction of collections staff. During a trial sampling data input, approximately 1000 collection records were processed in this electronic format, a controlled index of nomenclature was initiated, and a manual of operations completed. In 2005, with the assistance of the Office of the Assistant Secretary, the museum transitioned from Willoughby Associates' *iO* collections information system to Gallery Systems' *The Museum System* (TMS). The conversion to TMS was completed in 2007.

III. Collections Development Mission

ACM collects artifacts, works of art, photographs, documents and paper records, audio-visual media, and other material. Collections development efforts will focus on materials that reflect and highlight the four areas of focus within the research mission:

A. City

--here, the focus is on collections materials that document dynamics of change, historical continuity, conflict, and compromise that take place within urban contexts. Examples of subjects included are: demographic changes and gentrification; formation of new communities; shaping of the urban built environment; community struggles and decision-making.

B. Arts

--the emphasis is on collecting materials that document arts activities developing within urban contexts; emerging artists; self-taught artists, and also to continue through collecting goals to explore the impact and meaning of community-based arts activities.

C. Encounters

--the focus is on cultural, technological, and ethnic encounters. This includes collecting goals that document subjects such as immigration and migration; impact of communications technology; globalization; and popular culture.

D. Ecology

--the focus is on collecting materials that document the relationship between human society, the built environment, and the natural world specifically within the context of neighborhood and urban community life.

IV. Geographic scope and focus of Collections

East of the Anacostia River remains a central geographic focus for collecting goals. Artifacts and materials that document the history and ongoing community life of wards 7 and 8 will be targeted. The museum collects materials from and that represent the broader Washington DC Metropolitan Area, other urban contexts within the United States; and also collects internationally. These materials should demonstrate a strong capacity for documentation of the four areas of mission focus, and curatorial staff should be able to articulate a strong relationship to the museum mission.

V. Community Documentation Initiative

The CDI implements and facilitates community-focused research efforts and makes it available to the public in a direct and accessible way. Community mapping and survey projects, organized around selected issues or subjects, are developed by

museum staff in consultation with area scholars and a community advisory body. Project staff also conduct historical research and on-the-ground fieldwork, conduct surveys, interview residents, and develop a photographic record documenting project efforts.

VI. Legacy Collection

Comprised largely of paintings and prints by African American artists, objects representing African American popular culture, and historical artifacts --holdings and collections focusing primarily on African American history and culture will not substantially increase.