

BOARD POLICIES

Cowan, Fine Arts, and Local History Collection Management

Category: Operational

Approved: June 20, 2007

Revised: March 25, 2015, September 25, 2024

I. Mission

Cowan Pottery Museum is an integral part of the Rocky River Public Library and a cultural asset unique to our community. Produced in Lakewood and Rocky River between 1912 and 1932, the pottery is recognized for its vibrant colors, pioneering work in glazes, and variety of shapes. Because Cowan pottery is a unique expression of local history that is internationally acclaimed, Rocky River Public Library is committed to maintaining, celebrating, and promoting the collection. It is at the core of the Library's role as a cultural institution in the community.

Further, the mission of the Cowan Pottery Museum is to serve as a cultural repository and learning center for the works of R. Guy Cowan and his artistic colleagues and students who comprised the Cowan Pottery Studio (also known as the Cleveland Tile and Pottery Company). This involves acquiring, organizing, preserving, promoting, and celebrating the distinctive art pottery created by the Cowan artists, as well as their related writings and other art works.

The Library collection also includes the Fine Art Collection of historic and contemporary works, reflecting the cultural interests of this region and focusing on the creative output of Northeast Ohio. The Local History Collection of photographs and archives is specific to the history of Rocky River Public Library and the city of Rocky River.

II. Acquisitions

The Library may make acquisitions to the Cowan Pottery Museum, Fine Arts, and Local History collections that significantly enhance the Library and Museum's stated mission. All works should be in, or capable of being returned to, an acceptable state of preservation. The Library must be able to house and care for the proposed acquisition according to generally accepted museum practices.

New accessions may be made through purchase or by donation. All gifts must be approved in advance by the Library's Board of Trustees. New accessions (whether purchased or donated) should conform to the following guidelines:

- New accessions must be related to the Library's mission, goals, and guidelines.
- They should not be a duplicate of something already owned (unless the pieces provide additional educational opportunities).
- There must be proper space and appropriate resources for storing, preserving, and exhibiting the new piece(s).

- The donation must be accompanied by proper provenance.
- All new acquisitions must be properly accessioned and entered into the Cowan Pottery Museum's inventory.

Cowan Pottery Acquisitions

The primary collection goals of the Cowan Pottery Museum are to maintain and enhance the excellence of the Cowan Pottery Museum and to collect art pottery works produced by the Cowan Pottery Studio of Rocky River between 1920 and late 1931 that enhance the Library and Museum's ability to demonstrate the significance of this collection to Rocky River's history and to educate and instill an appreciation of Cowan Pottery.

Secondarily, acquisitions may be made of outstanding pieces related to the main Cowan era, including but not limited to such items as early pieces made in Lakewood during the period 1912-1917, pieces made by artists associated with Cowan Pottery either before or after the active phases of the Studio, and other types of art works (besides pottery) made by Cowan artists.

III. Gifts & Donor Recognition

Generally, donations of objects are not accepted [See: Gifts to the Library Policy]. Proposed donations of Cowan pottery, or fine art objects must be evaluated based upon the needs of the Library, the space available, and how well the proposed donation fits within the Library's collection and mission. The Board of Trustees reserves the right to reject donations of objects. In addition, gifts should be unconditional and nonrestrictive and should be given with full copyright. In general, long-term loans are unacceptable. The Library does not provide evaluation of gifts for tax or estate purposes. Once given, gifts become the sole property of the Library, which henceforth assumes the responsibility to care for and promote the gift as part of the collection. The Library reserves the right, however, to decide upon the gift's ultimate disposition.

Donor names and information shall become a permanent part of the accession record accompanying the donated item(s) and the names shall be listed in the inventory. In addition, when donated pieces are used for display or loan purposes, their names shall be noted as dictated by the "credit line" on the Deed of Gift on accompanying ID captions or plaques.

IV. Deaccessioning

From time to time, it may become necessary to deaccession items that are deemed not in accordance with the Library's collection policy. All deaccession requests must include method of disposal and be approved by the Board. The criteria for determining whether an object should be deaccessioned include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The object is not relevant to the mission of the Library and Cowan Pottery Museum or has little value in the Library's collection.
- The object is redundant or is a duplicate and is not necessary for research or study purposes.
- The Library is ordered to return an object to its original and rightful owner by a court of law; the Library determines that another entity is the rightful owner of the object; or the Library determines that the return of the object is in the best interest of the Library.

- The Library is unable to preserve the object in a responsible manner.
- The object is unduly difficult or impossible to care for or store properly.
- Other reasons as circumstances arise.

Disposal may be accomplished in the following ways:

- Items may be given to a more appropriate repository.
- Items may be auctioned at fair market value.
- On rare occasions it may become necessary to dispose of an item.
- Records must be kept of all deaccession activities.

V. Loans

Items in the Library's collection may be loaned at the discretion of the Curator and Library Director if the requesting institution has proper insurance and covers the costs of transporting the items. A signed agreement must be administered, including a date for the return of items.

VI. Security & Appraisal

The security of the distinctive and valuable collection of the Cowan Pottery Museum and Rocky River Public Library is of utmost concern and merits close attention and improvement when appropriate. The Library insures the permanent collection as well as any objects temporarily on loan. A full appraisal is to be performed every ten years. The Curator, the Library Director, and the Fiscal Officer shall work together towards the accomplishment of these goals of up-to-date security and regular appraisal. The Museum allows access to works not ordinarily on view to qualified individuals by appointment only. Access is granted for valid research purposes and must be approved by the Director. The individual seeking access must make their request in writing, stating the purpose and scope of their research and, if applicable, their professional affiliation. Requests are approved on a case-by-case basis contingent on staff availability. Researchers are assisted by Library staff at all times.