

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
**DEPARTMENTAL MANUAL**

Museum Property Handbook  
(411 DM, Volume II)

---

Chapter 1 Documentation and Accountability for Museum Property

**A. PURPOSE OF MUSEUM PROPERTY RECORDS**

A well managed museum property recordkeeping program ensures physical and intellectual access to museum property. Museum property records provide managers the information they need to make responsible decisions regarding staffing, space, and budget allocations for the museum property program.

Accountability is established to ensure the continuing availability and usefulness of museum property. Records provide information about an object or specimen's significance, condition, and history. Detailed and accurate records ensure that museum property will be well preserved and documented for a variety of purposes, for present and future generations. Standards and mandatory procedures are outlined in the Departmental Manual, Part 411.

Physical protection of museum objects and/or specimens is only part of the job of museum property managers. Documentation places objects into meaningful context. In archeology, for example, the relationships that existed among artifacts in situ are much more important than any artifact alone, and must be recorded in museum property documentation records. Museum property records serve four basic purposes:

- ! accountability--recording what the objects and/or specimens are, how many there are, and where they are physically located;
- ! documentation--recording observations on physical description and associated data for research, interpretation, and management purposes;
- ! preservation--recording changes in the condition of the objects and/or specimens and planning for preservation treatments; and
- ! accessibility (both physical and intellectual)--making museum property available for the benefit of the public.

Accessibility to the information inherent in museum property is the ultimate goal of museum property management. Museum objects and specimens are capable of providing a wide variety

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
**DEPARTMENTAL MANUAL**

Museum Property Handbook  
(411 DM, Volume II)

---

Chapter 1 Documentation and Accountability for Museum Property

of information and answering questions posed now and in the future. The quality of the answers derived from museum property depends on the precision of the questions asked and the data available to answer those questions. Without physical and intellectual access to the collections and their associated records, no new knowledge or interpretation could be obtained.

**B. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR MUSEUM PROPERTY RECORDKEEPING PROCEDURES**

Departmental museum property recordkeeping procedures are designed to achieve accountability and documentation for all museum property controlled by Departmental bureaus. Recordkeeping is an ongoing process. It includes accession, catalog, inventory, loan, and deaccession procedures. While similar to procedures in other property-management systems, museum property managers use terms appropriate to the museum profession. Standards and mandatory procedures are outlined in the Departmental Manual, Part 411. Some of the most commonly used museum property management terms (those that provide the names of chapters in this Handbook) are discussed below.

**Accessioning** is addressed in Chapter 2. Accession records identify the sources and rates of acquisition. They document that both the title and/or custody to the objects and/or specimens and the copyright (when appropriate) are obtained free and clear and without restrictions. They assist in planning of storage facilities and curation budgets adequate to accommodate current and expected rates of acquisition. Permits and other documentation are maintained as part of the accession records when state or Federal regulations, laws, or international treaties are applicable.

**Catalog records** are described in Chapter 3. Cataloging provides a record of collection management, research, and discipline-specific information about an object or specimen. In total, catalog records define in detail the identity of existing collections, serve as a management tool for planning and provide a listing of the unit's museum property resources.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
**DEPARTMENTAL MANUAL**

Museum Property Handbook  
(411 DM, Volume II)

---

Chapter 1 Documentation and Accountability for Museum Property

**Inventories** and other special instructions are presented in Chapter 4. Physical inventory involves the periodic verification of physical location and condition of museum property for which the bureau is responsible. Periodic inventories identify missing objects and/or specimens, document evidence of change or damage to objects and/or specimens or labels, and provide an opportunity to reconcile records and to improve them.

**Loans** are discussed in Chapter 5. Incoming loans are museum property held in temporary custody without the transfer of title (ownership) to further the bureau's goals of research, preservation, and interpretation. Long-term incoming and outgoing loans are, with few exceptions, for the purpose of providing curation and storage services. Loan records provide accountability by recording the purpose and length of loans, borrower's and lender's contact data, and packing, shipping, and insurance arrangements.

**Deaccessioning** is discussed in Chapter 6. Each deaccession records the permanent removal of an object and/or specimen from a museum property collection. Deaccession records provide part of the history of museum property management at a particular unit or bureau.

**C. PERMANENCE OF MUSEUM RECORDS**

Paper records, like the museum property they document, should withstand the rigors of time. They are the key to information associated with objects and specimens and support the legal framework for their management. Inherent acidity and additives such as bleaches and dyes can cause paper to self-destruct. The life expectancy of museum records can be extended by use of archival-quality materials.

All museum records, including forms, folders, and logbooks, should be made of archival-quality paper. Maximum permanence may be achieved by using acid-free alkaline paper having no lignin or alum rosin sizing. Paper should be made of cotton, linen, or fully-bleached chemical wood pulp, and should have an alkaline buffer of no less than 3% and a pH between 8 and 10.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
**DEPARTMENTAL MANUAL**

Museum Property Handbook  
(411 DM, Volume II)

---

Chapter 1 Documentation and Accountability for Museum Property

The shelf life of paper is further extended when it is stored in archival buffered file folders. Archival-quality paper should also be used for photocopies of historical and/or scientific documentation and museum records.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

**DEPARTMENTAL MANUAL**

Museum Property Handbook  
(411 DM, Volume II)

---

Chapter 1 Documentation and Accountability for Museum Property

Release Date:  
New

1:5