01/16/2026

NHS Mission and Vision

Mission Statement

The mission of the Niles Historical Society is to preserve, interpret, teach, and collect the history of the Village of Niles, Illinois.

Vision Statement

To achieve its mission, the Niles Historical Society will:

- Educate the community in its history through exhibits, programming, social media, and community involvement.
- Be a resource for residents to research and learn.
- Acquire photos, documents, and artifacts pertaining to Niles history.
- Engage with and preserve community events.
- Network, assist, and interact with other local historical societies in the Northern Chicago Suburbs

Value Statement

The Niles Historical and Cultural Center values:

- Integrity
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Ethics
- Inclusivity
- Responsible Stewardship
- Community Engagement

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Collection Management Policy

Purpose of the Policy

The collection management policy outlines how the Niles Historical Society (NHS) will preserve, grow, and refine their collection according to their mission and professional museum standards. This policy ensures that all artifacts in the NHS's possession are secure, safe, and preserved for future generations and all acquisitions, deaccessions, and loans conform to the NHS's mission, complies with applicable law, and adheres to current ethical standards.

This policy was formally written in December 2024 and will be reviewed by the board and staff every five years to ensure it still adheres to best practices according to Illinois law and museum ethics as defined by the American Association of Museums.

Scope of Collection

The Niles Historical Society's original mission stated:

> "The Society will assist in the preservation of material and for it's [sic] accessibility of the records and archives of the Village of Niles to encourage study in our village, state and nation to promote a better appreciation of our American Heritage."

As such, the collection broadly covers time period (objects from late 19th century until today), location (made or purchased in Niles, Chicago, Illinois, or nearby village or township) and/or connection to a Niles resident.

As of 2024 and the drafting of this policy, the NHS seeks to focus more to location than time period, specifically collecting and preserving artifacts about businesses, residents, homes, streets, schools, municipal departments, community events or milestones, and clubs and organizations from the area that is now incorporated Niles. The NHS will continue to collect artifacts relevant to our residents as long as the objects contribute to the history of the village, Niles township, or Maine township.

The collection is made up of the following categories:

- Permanent Collection: artifacts which tell the story of Niles and are used in exhibits. When not on display, these artifacts are kept in a safe location where they can be maintained and preserved by the NHS Curator. These artifacts fall into the following four categories:
    - Objects (e.g. textiles, kitchenware, appliances, furniture, sports paraphernalia, toys, paintings, medical supplies, etc.)
    - Photographs: physical copies kept on site and digital copies provided by donors
    - Archival material: non-published, written works (e.g. newsletters, schedules, menus)
    - Library: published, written works (e.g. books, newspapers)
- Educational Collection: objects and books used to teach groups about how Niles residents used to live. Objects in this collection are in great working order and sturdy enough to touch and handle. These objects were accessioned into the permanent collection but are not relevant to Niles, specifically.
- Reference Collection: Archival and Library material to assist residents with personal research on their genealogy or homes.

Conservation and Access

The NHS has ethical and legal obligations to protect and preserve their collection in the public trust for the public's use present and future. The Museum Curator regularly monitors the collection's condition status and maintains proper temperature, humidity, and cleanliness to the best of their ability. Volunteers supervised by the Museum Curator might assist with this task. To ensure objects stay in whole and stable condition, the storage area on the third floor is restricted to the Museum Curator and Museum Coordinator along with approved volunteers working on the collection. Anyone with business on the third floor (e.g. repairmen, movers, assessors, etc.) must be accompanied by a museum staff member. Anyone handling objects in the collection must be supervised by the Museum Curator and follow best practices as defined by the American Alliance of Museums and professional manuals.

The public has access to designated objects from the collection at the approval of the Museum Curator for research purposes. Research requests can be made via email or through contacting museum staff on social media. All other collection materials are made available to the public in exhibit spaces at the Niles Historical and Cultural Center or in locked cases off-site.

Accession Policy

Accessioning is the formal procedure for taking items into the museum's permanent collection. Artifacts in the museum's collection are owned by the NHS. The NHS and its successors have all rights, title, and interest including copyright, trademark, and related interests, in and to anything accessioned into the collection. Donors should be aware that anything donated to the NHS which it accessions into its collection:

- May not be reclaimed by the donor or their heirs.
- May not be kept permanently. (See Deaccession policy below)
- May not be kept together or exhibited as a unit.
- Might not be on permanent exhibit.

If a donor does not want to grant exclusive rights to an object to the NHS, restrictions may be applied at the discretion of the Museum Curator. In these cases, a loan might be more applicable (see Loan Policy below). The NHS will not accept items from a donor that the donor does not have a right to own (i.e. stolen, or authentic Native American artifacts). If such an item is found in the collection, NHS will follow Illinois law regarding repatriation (returning to the rightful owner) of the object. In the case of any authentic Native American artifacts in the collection, procedures set by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) will be followed.

Accessioning Procedure

The NHS is always looking to build its collection. All objects must first go through an assessment by the Museum Curator and Museum Coordinator. This ensures all objects accessioned in the collection can be properly stored and that all objects further the museum's mission and vision statements.

Donors should contact a museum staff member to let them know about the desired donation. Digital photos or scans of objects or an exhaustive list should be sent to the museum curator for assessment. For digital photos, see the policy below.

If a donor prefers to bring objects in person, donors may bring objects to the museum by appointment only. At this time, the museum curator (or museum coordinator in their absence) will assess the donation to determine if the objects are:

- Relevant to the mission statement (Does it have Niles connection? Was it made, used, and/or owned by the Village of Niles or a long-time resident? Is it unique to Niles?)
- Relevant to the vision statement (Does it have information valuable to research? Can it be used for education purposes?)
- Able to be cared for and preserved given current space and staff availability.
- Not a duplicate of something already in the collection.

For items being reviewed via photo or scan, museum staff will reach out to the donor about what objects they would like to accession. For in-person donations, the museum staff member will return any objects not fitting the above criteria to the donor. Next, the donor must sign a Deed of Gift form which gives the NHS the rights to any objects taken for the collection. A list of all items the museum will accession will be attached to the deed of gift.

Digital Photo Donations

If a donor wishes to give the NHS a digital copy of a photograph or archival material, a Deed of Gift must be signed to ensure that the NHS will have all rights and copyright over the photo's use. If photos or archival material is sent via email and a Deed of Gift is not signed, the original email will stand in as a Deed of Gift and saved with the photo files allowing the NHS fair use of the photograph unless specified in the body of the email.

Loan Policy

Loans help supplement the NHS collection for an exhibit or program to better achieve its mission. In some cases, the NHS can assist other non-profit organizations and continue educating the public by loaning out artifacts from their collection.

In-Coming Loans

If a donor does not want to give NHS exclusive rights to an item and has an item relevant to an exhibit or program, a temporary loan may be given. The lender must reach out to Museum Curator with a photo or description of the object. The Museum Curator will schedule a day for the item to be dropped off at which time at Temporary Loan form will be filled out and signed. The duration of the loan will be determined at that time. Loans for an unspecified amount of time will not be accepted. The item will be assigned a loan number and all credit for the artifact's use will acknowledge the donor.

At the end of the loan period, museum staff will reach out to the lender to retrieve their property. Primary communication may be done by phone or email, but secondary communication will be in writing for museum records. Any property not retrieved will be subject to the Unclaimed Loan policy below.

Out-going Loans

Non-profit organizations whose mission includes education can request an artifact from the collection for use. All requests must be made to and approved by the museum curator. Artifacts must be credited to the Niles Historical Society.

Special Circumstances

Undocumented Objects

Any items found in the NHS collection without a museum object ID number (i.e. undocumented) will be accessioned according to the procedure above and assigned a number after thorough research has been conducted for the original record. Undocumented items will be kept in the NHS's collection for seven years before it may be deaccessioned in accordance with the Illinois Museum Disposition of Property Act (IMDPA).

Unclaimed Loans

Per the IMDPA, a final written notice will be sent the original lender or their heirs, if applicable. If the lender or their heirs don't respond or respond but do not retrieve property within 90 days of the response, then the museum will either accession or deaccession the object(s) one year from when the written notice was sent.

Deaccession Policy

Deaccessioning is the formal act of removing artifacts from the collection. To make the most of the safe storage space in the building and be able to best perform to its mission and vision, the NHS might deaccession items to strengthen the collection.

First, artifacts will be assessed and researched by the Museum Curator to determine if objects:

- Are relevant to the Museum's mission and vision statements.
- Are in good condition and not a risk to the preservation of the rest of the collection or the health of museum staff and volunteers.
- Can be safely stored and preserved in perpetuity.
- Are not a duplicate.

If an object does not fit any of the above criteria, the Museum Curator will recommend a method of disposal either by (1) donating to another museum or education non-profit where the object fits the mission, (2) public auction or consignment, or (3) destroyed. The recommendations will be reviewed by a Deaccessioning Sub-committee of the NHS Board. Their recommendations for deaccessioning will be sent for final approval by the NHS Board.

Per American Alliance of Museums ethical standards, any proceeds made by the sale of the item will be set aside for collection management only. This includes the purchase of archival storage items, shelving units, climate and humidity control, and building repairs that threaten the state and security of the collection.

Artifact Trade Policy

In keeping with the NHS's ethical obligation to keep objects in the public trust for as long as possible, no artifacts will be deaccessioned directly to a private collector, especially not to obtain artifacts for the collection.