

Project Overview

The Preston Historic District has been an important gathering place in Belle Plaine, Iowa since George Preston took ownership in 1923. No longer in operation, Preston's Station has become a landmark that tells the story of its community and the Lincoln Highway.

The current caretakers of the Station are fourth generation Prestons dedicated to preserving the site, its collections, and connected history. They have initiated the process to add the site to the national historic register.

This student research project focused on developing a foundational policy and procedure for cataloging and protecting the Preston Historic District collection including its buildings and contents.

Goals

1. Develop a collections management policy for the Preston Historic District collection that is accessible and considers available resources.
2. Create process forms to be used to accession, deaccession, and loan objects into the Preston Station collections.
3. Provide resources on collections care, preservation, and management that meet the specific needs of Preston's Station.

Methods

1. Visit collection and meet with Preston Station Historic District Board to discuss organizational goals, identify collection management issues, document structures, and identify available resources.
2. Develop literature review of collections management policies and preservation strategies for similar collections and organizations.
3. Create a tiered collection management policy with process forms, including accession, deaccession, and loan forms.
4. Present final collections management policy along with recommend actions for immediate care of collections.

Definitions

Accession: the formal process used to accept and record an item as an official collection object.

Collections Management Policy: a board-approved (or other governing authority) document that governs the collecting activities of a museum.

Deaccession: the formal process used to remove an object from the collection permanently; this is separate from disposal.

Tiered Collection: the process of categorizing a museum's collection into separate parts, or 'tiers,' based on the purposes of the items or how well they support the museum's mission.



Interior and exterior photos of Preston Station.



Preston Station Collection Tiering Approach

1. **Foundation Artifacts**
Include the most personal and significant items, which relate to the formation and influence of Preston's Station.
They are:
 - Part of the permanent collection and require the most care.
 - Are used for research and exhibit purposes.
 - Examples include: station building and contents, antique road signs affixed to the building, and newspaper clippings about the Station.
2. **Education Artifacts**
Include objects to be shared with the community, schools, and the public.
They are:
 - Related to the history of Belle Plaine and the Lincoln Highway.
 - Slightly used, duplicates, and are not fragile.
 - Example: a traveling trunk containing artifacts to be shared with a student classroom.
3. **Cultural Artifacts**
Include objects that relate to community history but are not significant enough to be a foundation artifact.
They are:
 - Not necessarily connected to the Preston family personally, but come from the community or contain significant societal culture value.
 - Not necessarily part of the Station's permanent collection.
 - Examples: old washing machine, agricultural machinery.

Lessons Learned

1. Collection management approaches, although similar in overall best practices, can vary widely based on size of museum, the types of collection, and resources available.
2. Developing collection management processes for small, volunteer museums requires specific considerations for time in management when working with a limited staff.
3. The significance of artifacts in the preservation of oral and community history.
4. The satisfaction and reward that comes from service learning projects that provide real world experience while also supporting Iowa's museums in moving forward and serving their communities.

Acknowledgements

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For more information about Preston's Station Historic District