

DONATING ARTIFACTS OR SPECIMENS TO THE MUSEUM OF THE ROCKIES

This document is provided for potential donors of historic or natural objects. We are also happy to explain our policies and procedures to you and your family. Please feel free to contact the Museum Registrar with any questions or for help with the information contained here: Pat Roath, Museum of the Rockies, 600 W. Kagy Blvd., Bozeman, MT 59717, phone 406-994-5285, fax 406-994-2682, email proath@montana.edu; museum website: www.museumoftherockies.org.

Our collections

Thank you for your interest in the Museum of the Rockies collections of material culture and natural history. Our collections total nearly 370,000 objects covering 25 disciplines. These collections are used in a number of ways:

- Natural history specimens, including geological, astronomical, and paleontological materials, are primarily used in scientific research. Through our loan and visiting researcher programs, these specimens are shared around the world, and we have access to specimens from other museums. This research is highlighted in our galleries and in exhibits developed for other museums.
- Our photograph & film archives, with over 90,000 images, document the history of our region from the advent of photography to the present. These images are actively used in our exhibits, loaned to other museums, and are available for personal or professional research or for purchase by commercial users.
- Historic and archaeological artifacts make up the great majority of our collections. Covering a broad range of disciplines and representing the great variety of human activity in our region over the past 1500 years and into the 21st century, this material is intended for long-term preservation. It is used primarily for exhibit and for teaching museum methods to MSU students and interns, as well as by outside researchers. Our small fine art collection is supportive to the historical and archaeological collections.
- Teaching and Living History collections are actively used by interpreters and visitors. Teaching collections support educational activities associated with our exhibits and other programs. Living History collections are those things used by interpreters at the Tinsley Historic House and farm—the Tinsley House itself is our largest artifact! The Living History program interprets life in rural Montana between 1890 and 1910.

You may ask to have your donation placed in either the “permanent” or the “non-permanent” collections. The permanent collections (the first 3 listed above) are controlled by museum staff and require special considerations and permissions for use. This helps ensure that they will be preserved as long as possible. Teaching and Living History collections, the “non-permanent” collections, are actively used. They are more frequently in the public eye, but will eventually wear out and be disposed of.

Appraisals

Appraisal of your donation can happen at any time prior to, during, or after the donation process. The Museum of the Rockies cannot provide monetary valuations to donors, but we are happy to work the appraiser of your choice. Please ask us if you would like more details about appraising your donation.

The donation process

Donating your object to the museum involves several steps. Should we choose to not accept your donation at any point in this process, we will return your object to you and will be happy to help you find another appropriate repository.

1. If you prefer to keep your object prior to a final decision, we will ask for a photograph of the donation so that we can share it more easily with the staff involved. If you'd like us to hold your donation, we will give you a temporary receipt for it. While your object is in our hands, we will take the utmost care of it.
2. Your offer will first be discussed with the curator or manager of the discipline represented. The curator may accept the object for consideration by committee, or decide that it is inappropriate for our collections.
3. After the curator's acceptance, all donations to the permanent collections require committee approval; this committee generally meets quarterly. Donations to the non-permanent collections require approval of the managers of those collections, but do not require committee approval.
4. Upon committee approval (or, for non-permanent collections, after the manager's approval), we will send you a *Gift Agreement*, which is the document that transfers legal ownership of the object from you to us. Once we receive the signed *Gift Agreement*, your object becomes part of our collections, to be incorporated into our programs and activities accordingly.

Credit line and restrictions

You may specify a “credit line” that will become part of the exhibit label should your donation be exhibited. Please talk with us if you are interested in this, or if your gift is in memory of someone. If not otherwise specified, the credit line for your donation will read “Gift of [your name]”. You may also request that your gift be anonymous; if so, you will not be identified to the public, but in order for your gift to be legal we must have on file a signed gift document with your contact information.

The Museum prefers that object gifts be unrestricted, meaning that once the object is legally ours, we control its use. Any limitations or restrictions to this policy must be discussed and agreed to by both parties prior to signing the gift document. You and your family may “visit” your donation during normal business hours; please contact us a few days ahead of time to schedule a visit so that we can have your donation ready for you. Please note that:

- Restrictions may not be placed by donors or their heirs subsequent to signing a *Gift Agreement* or other legal gift document.
- Restrictions cannot be placed on donations to the Teaching or Living History collections.
- We cannot guarantee that any object or group of objects will be exhibited or actively researched, cannot place any object on permanent exhibit, and cannot loan objects back to donors or their families.

What we can & can't accept

The Museum of the Rockies is pleased to consider any offered artifact or specimen. However, our storage space is limited and there are legal and ethical considerations associated with each donation. These considerations vary somewhat depending on the type of artifact or specimen in question, but in general, we collect objects that relate to or are descriptive of the human and natural history of the region. Please contact the Registrar for more detail, but here are a few important points:

- Object donations must meet the established criteria for the collection to which it is to be donated. For example, donations to the Living History collections must be appropriate to the interpreted period. We will be happy to provide and explain these criteria to you.
- Object donations must be made by the object's legal owner. For objects collected from the ground, the donor must be the landowner of the place of collection.
- For archaeological artifacts and natural history specimens (including dinosaur bones) to be accepted to our permanent collections, we must have the geographic coordinates and other discovery details. Specimens without this data are occasionally accepted to our teaching collection, but cannot be accepted into our permanent collections.
- Historical artifacts with documented histories, including who used it and where & when it was used, are preferred over those with an unknown background. In general, the more information you have about your object, the better!
- We prefer that objects be whole, clean and in generally stable condition at the time of donation. However, exceptions can sometimes be made for an object that is potentially fragile, so please talk with us before undertaking a major cleaning project.
- The Museum does not collect taxidermy.
- The Museum respects the protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources; to this end, we cannot accept:
 - human remains, grave goods or culturally sacred objects
 - objects that have illegally changed hands
 - objects of cultural patrimony that cannot be shown to have clear legal provenance and/or that are subject to repatriation
 - specimens from protected species without associated permits or legal clearance
 - specimens or artifacts collected without written permission from public lands
 - items collected under circumstances that encourage damage or destruction of biota, established collecting sites, cultural monuments or human burial places.

Once again, thank you for your interest in the Museum of the Rockies collections. As extensive as our collections are, they were built primarily through donations such as yours. We greatly appreciate your contribution to the history and understanding of our region.

For more information, please contact the Museum Registrar noted above.