



# SCOPE OF COLLECTIONS STATEMENT

CALIFORNIA STATE RAILROAD MUSEUM  
OLD SACRAMENTO STATE HISTORIC PARK

2018

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## PURPOSE

Building on the California State Railroad Museum's (CSRM) founding collections, the Scope of Collections Statement sets a guided course of action for future donated and purchased acquisitions to effectively execute the Museum's mission and core values. The Scope informs decisions on care, preservation, access and deaccession strategies while observing professional standards.

## MISSION

The California State Railroad Museum preserves and interprets the artifacts and culture of Western railroads and railroading for present and future generations. We use iconic collections, innovative and immersive exhibits, engaging interpretation and programs, and memorable events to create enjoyable experiences, empower learning and inspire appreciation for a diverse audience about the role and impact of the railroad and mobility in California, the West and the Nation.

## VISION

The California State Railroad Museum is a pre-eminent leader in railroad heritage preservation, engaging and enriching present and future generations about what railroads mean in our lives.

## COLLECTION HISTORY AND SUMMARY

The California State Railroad Museum's core collection was formed by a donation of historic locomotives and cars from the Pacific Coast Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, Inc. in 1969. The Museum also received a major transfer of existing railroad collections from the California Department of Parks and Recreation in 1977. Since then, significant railroad collections have been gifted to CSRM by Bancroft Library, Smithsonian Institution, De Golyer Library, City of Sacramento, Southern Pacific, Western Pacific, Union Pacific, Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe and private collectors such as Henry Sorenson, Thomas W. Sefton, Herbert R. Meyer and Frank Saarni. In addition, limited acquisition funds provided by California State Railroad Museum Foundation enable the Museum to pursue valued collections.

The California State Railroad Museum collection is acquired, preserved, researched, exhibited and interpreted to further the Museum's mission. Artifacts are primarily acquired for preservation and interpretation, although some may be designated for interpretive operation and hands-on use. Many of the Museum's locomotives and other rolling stock are sole surviving and/or the best examples in North America. CSRM owns five of the fewer than thirty full-size steam locomotives in the U.S. built prior to 1880. Supporting the full-size

equipment collection are three-dimensional objects, including decorative arts, original fine art and iconic toy trains and scale models which as a whole comprise the most significant and comprehensive railroad history artifact collection in North America. These artifacts form a relatable context, enabling connections to the complex and diverse aspects of railroads as well as the culture of railroading and its impact on society.

The California State Railroad Museum Library & Archives' extensive collections and high research value are integral to the Museum's functions. The non-circulating collection is North America's foremost research collection on railroad history and technology as well as the California State Park System's only public research library and archives.

Documentary collections include archival, published, graphic materials and media pertaining to railroad history and technology. The core collection comprises over 2.5 million photographic images including the collections of James Boynton, Paul Darrell, Gilbert Kneiss, Roger Levenson, Warren Marcus, Robert McVay, Louis L. Stein, Jr., Stanley F. Merritt, Richard Hendrickson, Philip Hastings, Gerald Best and the Pacific Fruit Express Company. In addition, there are 10,000 cubic feet of business archives; more than 250,000 maps and drawings; extensive manuscripts, diaries, letters, maps, engineers' and surveyors' notebooks; construction, business, equipment, personnel, financial and land records covering more than 4,000 railroads throughout North America from the 1820s to the present; and more than 11,000 cataloged books and microfilm copies of significant materials held by other repositories. The Library & Archives also maintains sound recordings, original and archival motion picture film and video recordings on subjects pertinent to railroading and railroad history and technology.

## CORE VALUES AND INTERPRETIVE FOCUS

As adopted in the 2017 Strategic Plan, CSRMs core values include community service, museum excellence, diversity, relationships, participation, sustainability, and innovation.

CSRMs collections cut across each of these core values. Collections are also unique in that they represent both the "what" and the "how" of our interpretive strategy. As an institution, we are rooted in an era wherein museums were designed to serve primarily as repositories of objects. Like many museums, CSRMs utilizes interpretive techniques with its visitors. Establishing a connection, between visitors and objects, is not only essential interpretively, but key for visitors' understanding of the importance of collections management and care. CSRMs aspiration is that a positive and strong connection between visitors and objects will lead to visitors' appreciation, preservation and protection of objects. But objects, themselves, also do some of the interpretive work in connecting people to the "real stuff" of the past and thus having the potential to elicit an emotional response from museum visitors.

Museums are shifting from repositories of "things" and keepers of objects, to places that help people understand our past and help define their present and future. Collections and collecting will continue to represent a significant function of CSRMs during this slow-moving shift. Still, as CSRMs moves from a collections-centric to a visitor-centric institution, our interpretive strategies will also influence the Museum's collections decisions. Specifically, as CSRMs begins to privilege stories of the people who built and maintained the railroads as well as the stories of people whose lives were shaped by various aspects of railroading, the

Museum will inevitably choose to accept objects that better highlight the human aspects of the railroads and of railroading.

CSRM's collection policy should be mindful of CSRM's larger interpretive goals, which are summarized in the following statements:

**Our lives are made of Railroad stories.**

**We tell the stories of the Railroad through the stories of people.**

This perspective should serve as an important consideration in contemplating gifts and in seeking future acquisitions. As a matter of policy and procedure, collections should be viewed not as a separate and discrete function of the Museum, but as an integral and interconnected aspect of CSRM's core values.

## COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

The California State Railroad Museum and its Library & Archives subscribes to a collection development policy that values provenance, historical significance and relevance. This policy contributes to CSRM's Mission and Vision established by the institution wide Strategic Plan to maintain leadership in railroad heritage preservation. CSRM collections strives to prioritize high research value and interpretation potential in its development, primarily through donations. It also emphasizes the value of connecting people with meaningful objects and materials in an accessible environment.

Informed by the Core Values, CSRM builds across all collections adhering to themes and subjects centered on railroad history, technology and its impact on history at large: construction and operation, experience and use, community and relationships. These standards frame decisions regarding acquisitions, deaccessions and everything in between.

**CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION** demonstrates building railroads highlighting business, technology, industry standards, economics, environmental impact, social and political issues, government regulations, etc.

**EXPERIENCE AND USE** relates life and work on the railroad for all involved, focusing on groups of people currently underrepresented in the collection

**COMMUNITY AND RELATIONSHIPS** engages human stories and connections to the railroad as well as works about railroading

**CRITERIA** Accepting an item or collection for CSRM prompts serious consideration of the provenance, condition, long-term collection care, potential for interpretation or research value and relevance to existing collections. Acquisition decisions will examine the source of donation, chain of custody, rarity, geographical significance, subject matter addressed, historical significance, condition and potential to illustrate a human story, especially of groups who are currently underrepresented within the collection. Specifically for full-size equipment, decisions are made against criteria which include consideration of the builder, rarity, uniqueness, historical operation, previous owners, other preserved examples, continued existence, location, condition, age, historic integrity, potential use, operability, value and specific program needs.

**GEOGRAPHY** In general terms, CSRM collections are geographically centered on California and the West. The West defined as Hawaii and Alaska as well as land west of the Rocky Mountain range extending in the north through Canada, United States and south through Mexico. Some collections may extend beyond these boundaries for comparative research or if its significance outweighs geographical lines.

**OWNERSHIP OF ORIGINALS** It is the Museum's policy to have full and clear title to all permanent collections held by the institution. CSRM places a high priority and value on owning original, authentic and well-documented original collections as opposed to reproductions, replicas or fakes.

**SUSTAINABILITY** Responsible stewardship and professional curatorial practices form the basis of decisions balancing needs and constraints such as finite storage, staff processing time, funds, resources, and the ability to facilitate access. Serious thought is assigned to the Museum's long-term investment on preservation, documentation, interpretation, exhibition and research. To properly balance these functions of the collection and allocate resources in a responsible manner, CSRM must be selective in its collection development. As a result of nearly forty years of active collecting, parts of the collection are comprehensive, allowing focused growth in other areas. It is the responsibility of CSRM's leadership and collections managers to acquire and accession collections on a case by case basis, making conscious curatorial decisions based on thoughtful and well-researched justifications.

**LIMITATIONS** Going forward, CSRM will only accept collections on long-term or permanent loans as rare exceptions. In addition, CSRM will not acquire collections with donor restrictions.

**PARTNERSHIPS** CSRM collections have benefited from professional partnerships with individuals and organizations such as Railway and Locomotive Historical Society, Pacific Locomotive Association and National Model Railroad Association. CSRM will continue to seek out and nurture these partnerships with a goal of understanding and meeting various needs of the larger community.

## REVIEW

The Scope of Collections Statement is a living document to be reviewed and revised as necessary every five years or in response to changes of the Museum's related policies. Revised statements to be approved by the Museum Director and District Superintendent.