

**Atwater Kent Museum [Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent]
Revised Collection Transfer Plan**

November 2019

The Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent (Museum) collection – the “Collection” – consists of more than 133,000 artifacts that reflect 350 years of Philadelphia’s remarkable history. This plan outlines a partnership between the Board of Trustees of the Atwater Kent Museum (Trustees), the City of Philadelphia (City), and Drexel University (Drexel) to sustain, care for, and steward the Collection. The goals of this plan are (1) to keep the Collection in Philadelphia to tell Philadelphia stories for many generations, and (2) to increase access to the Collection through a loan program to cultural and educational institutions of all sizes, a digital website portal, and exhibitions.

Background

The Museum’s mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and provide exhibition and educational programs using its Collection to tell the important stories of Philadelphia’s past and to give context for its present.

Despite the deep affection that many Philadelphians hold for the Museum and Collection, for two decades the Trustees struggled to preserve the Museum in the face of low attendance and severe financial constraints. Starting in the 1990s, the Trustees undertook a number of measures to improve the Museum’s long-term financial viability. They expanded board membership to include more donors and fundraisers. They instituted admission fees. They hired an experienced Executive Director charged with developing innovative programming to attract more visitors. They undertook a major renovation of the Museum building that cost several million dollars. They used a new name to rebrand the Museum more effectively. They tried to align the Museum with other museums in the Philadelphia region. Unfortunately, none of those efforts significantly improved the Museum’s fortunes.

Over several months in 2017 and 2018, the Trustees met with a renowned Philadelphia institution of higher education and discussed an alliance to develop a Center for Philadelphia Studies that would include continued use of the Museum building to display the Collection. The Trustees could not complete that effort for reasons beyond the Trustee’s control. Finally, the Trustees decided that it was necessary to close the Museum to the public and focus on developing a strategy for sustaining the Collection.

The Museum closed in July 2018 and the Trustees sought a new partner with the financial, cultural, and technological resources to do the following:

- Evaluate and cull the Collection to establish a “Core Collection” of artifacts relevant to telling the stories of Philadelphia’s history and which have historical provenance or significance.
- Acquire artifacts to add to the Collection.

- Create a robust loan program to support public exhibits, interpretive programming, continued research, and educational programs in Philadelphia’s diverse cultural and academic organizations and institutions.
- Curate and mount public exhibits in appropriate facilities using the Collection, including free exhibits.
- Steward the Collection so that it remains in Philadelphia and is accessible to students, visitors, educators, and scholars for generations to come.

The Trustees and City identified Drexel as an appropriate partner because it is a collecting institution that teaches museology and the professional management of museums and because it curates a number of public exhibitions annually. Drexel has the expertise to evaluate the Collection thoroughly, scale the Collection to a core of artifacts, acquire new artifacts to add to the Collection, exhibit artifacts from the Collection, and manage a loan program. Drexel has existing partnerships with many cultural institutions across Philadelphia and has experience in developing digital databases that would allow other Philadelphia academic and cultural institutions to identify and request items from the Collection for short-, medium-, and long-term loans.

Since the closing of the Museum, the Trustees, City, and Drexel have received input from many Philadelphians who are interested in and concerned about the future of the Collection. All agreed on the importance of keeping the core of the Collection in Philadelphia to allow for the creation of exhibitions, educational programs, and future research around these historical artifacts. A common thread among these Philadelphia stakeholders was that, in the absence of a dedicated museum, a loan program of the Collection should be developed to allow exhibiting institutions, large and small, to use the artifacts to continue to tell Philadelphia’s stories. The Trustees, City, and Drexel presented this idea at a public meeting in February 2019 and at second, follow-up public meeting held in September 2019. Altogether, the meetings had over 400 attendees. Through their questions and comments shared at the meetings, the attendees emphasized how important the Collection was to them personally and to Philadelphia’s students.

A partnership between the Trustees, the City, and Drexel will sustain Atwater Kent’s goal of using the Collection to tell stories of Philadelphia and Philadelphians for many years to come.

Purpose

This plan outlines a collaborative partnership that the Trustees, the City, and Drexel believe will make more artifacts from the Collection available to the public than were ever made available within the walls of the Museum. The following activities will be undertaken in support of the goals of increased access and maintaining the Collection in Philadelphia:

Collection Evaluation

Drexel will conduct a thorough Collection evaluation to further research the artifacts in the Collection to understand their connection to Philadelphia’s history and the potential stories the artifacts can be used to tell. The Collection evaluation will include:

- Review of all gift agreements and restrictions.
- Identification of each artifact’s historic value or story.

- Identification of the artifacts that lack Philadelphia historical significance and or provenance.
- Identification of artifacts that are in poor condition or duplicative.
- Identification of gaps in the Collection and the types of objects and artifacts that should be added to the Collection to tell Philadelphia's complete history.

Drexel will establish a Collection Evaluation Committee to support these efforts and provide additional expert advice on the historical value of artifacts in the Collection and to consider whether artifacts lack historical significance or interpretive value and might be recommended for deaccession. The Collection Evaluation Committee will be comprised of a diverse group of museum, art, and history professionals from Philadelphia's cultural community as well as curatorial professionals from Drexel. The Committee will have the expertise and knowledge of Philadelphia's multiple histories and the diverse programs that could be supported by the Collection. City representatives, including the Trustees, with relevant knowledge and experience will be part of the Collection Evaluation Committee.

Transfer Ownership of the Collection

The City will transfer ownership of the Collection to Drexel. The transfer of ownership will include Drexel's assumption of the Trustees' fiduciary obligation to care for the Collection, in trust, consistent with the City ordinance regarding the Museum and Collection approved July 28, 1938, the physical storage of the Collection, the conservation of the Collection, the Trustees' obligations under their agreement with the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and obligations and restrictions under any other gift agreements.

The transfer requires prior Orphans Court approval. If the court grants its approval, then the Trustees, City and Drexel will execute a written transfer agreement. The agreement will include a reversionary provision that would allow the City to regain ownership of the Collection if Drexel fails to abide by the terms of the transfer or if Drexel decides it no longer wants to care for and steward the Collection. After the transfer is complete, Drexel will establish a Collection endowment trust fund to support preservation of the Collection and additions to it.

If Orphans' Court rejects the City's petition to approve the Collection transfer in accordance with this Transfer Plan, then Drexel will complete the Collection evaluation as described above. The evaluation and resulting recommendations are still needed to plan for future care and management of the Collection.

Changes to the Collection

Based on the Collection evaluation and the recommendations of the Collection Evaluation Committee, and following museum ethical standards, Drexel will deaccession artifacts in the Collection that are not historically, culturally, or artistically significant to Philadelphia; that are inadequate due to their condition or duplicative nature; or that do not have the capacity to be used either physically or virtually for display or educational purposes.

Drexel will establish a permanent Oversight Committee, led by Drexel's Senior Advisor to the President for Collections, to review and approve the recommended artifacts for deaccessioning. The Committee will be comprised of a minimum of 13 members. There will be two of the present Trustees, two additional representatives from the City as ex-officio members, two

representatives of the Atwater Kent Foundation, and other members appointed by Drexel, who will include members of Drexel's Board of Trustees.

When the entire Collection evaluation is done and the Collection Evaluation Committee has finished making its recommendations regarding which object to retain in a "core" Collection and which objects may be deaccessioned, the Trustees will be dissolved and the Collection Evaluation Committee will be dissolved as well. From that time onward, to replace the positions formerly held by the Trustees, the Mayor of Philadelphia may appoint two persons to the Oversight Committee. The persons appointed by the Mayor serve at the Mayor's pleasure.

If the Oversight Committee approves an artifact for deaccessioning that is valued at \$10,000 or more, Drexel's Senior Advisor to the President for Collections will need the approval of Drexel's Board of Trustees to deaccession the artifact. Otherwise, with the Senior Advisor's concurrence, Drexel can proceed to deaccession an artifact.

All artifacts recommended for deaccessioning are subject to the review of the relevant gift agreements. All artifacts approved for deaccessioning will first be made available for free to non-profit organizations in Philadelphia to ensure that the Collection remains in Philadelphia. Artifacts not wanted by Philadelphia non-profit organizations may be sent to auction. In accordance with museum industry best practices, all auction proceeds will be used to support new acquisitions to the Collection or the direct care of the Collection. Artifacts offered for free to Philadelphia non-profit organizations will be given under a written gift agreement. That agreement will require that if the recipient no longer wishes to own the artifact the recipient must first offer to return it to Drexel for free. If Drexel accepts the offer, then Drexel may sell the artifact and shall deposit the net sale proceeds into the Collection endowment trust. If Drexel declines the offer, the recipient may dispose of the artifact at the organization's discretion.

The Oversight Committee will also work with Drexel to develop a strategy for acquiring new artifacts to add to the Collection. The new artifacts will reflect Philadelphia's history or fill gaps in the Collection.

Loan Program

Drexel will develop and operate an active collections loan program for short-term, medium-term, and long-term loans to other non-profit cultural institutions and academic institutions in Philadelphia (including historic sites, societies, and houses; libraries; and museums), and to cultural and academic institutions outside Philadelphia, as appropriate and consistent with applicable museum standards.

The Oversight Committee will advise Drexel on the development and operation of the loan program including criteria for which organizations and institutions can borrow artifacts from the Collection and the process for how lending decisions will be made.

Digital Website Portal

Drexel will digitize representative portions of the entire Collection and develop a free searchable online website portal to allow anyone access to images and information on the Collection artifacts. On the Collection website portal, the public will be able to submit questions

about the Collection and will be able to request short-term, medium-term, and long-term loans from the Collection for exhibitions and programs.

Drexel Exhibitions

Drexel will use the Collection to curate exhibits on its Philadelphia campus. The exhibits will be open to the public and will include free exhibits.

Reporting

Drexel will provide quarterly reports to the Trustees, City, and Pennsylvania Attorney General’s office and meet at least once every two months with the Oversight Committee. The quarterly reports will include updates on the Collection (condition, deaccessioning activities and deaccessioned artifacts, and acquisitions, etc.), the work of the Collection Evaluation Committee, loans, exhibitions, and the digital website portal.

Funding

The City will provide approximately \$1.45 million to support all the work described above through FY24 (June 30, 2025). Drexel will have sole financial responsibility for the Collection starting July 1, 2025.

The plan is conditioned on the execution and delivery of definitive transfer documents, the City providing the funding described above, and the approval of the Attorney General and Orphans’ Court.

Timing

Below is a targeted schedule for accomplishing the above goals. These dates may change depending on the timing of the Orphans’ Court proceeding and decision.

February – December 2019	Meet with Attorney General Trustees hold Public Meetings to discuss plan and hear public comments Trustees and Drexel trustees vote on final Transfer Plan
Fall and Winter 2019–2020	Drexel forms the Collection Evaluation Committee and the Oversight Committee Collection evaluation begins, including digitization of Collection artifacts
January—March 2020	City files petition in Orphans’ Court
October 2019 –June 2022 (approx.)	Drexel conducts the Collection evaluation; develops regular reports; and meets with the the Collection Evaluation Committee and/or sub Committees and the Oversight Committee
July 2022 (approx.)	Collection evaluation complete Collection Evaluation Committee ends
When and if Orphans’ Court Approves the Transfer Plan	City and Drexel negotiate and sign a final Transfer Agreement Drexel exhibits artifacts from the Collection Drexel implements Collection loan program Drexel develops and provides access to digital portal, an online database of the Collection Oversight Committee continues to meet

