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Review of Things Great and Small

Lydia Tang

Michigan State University, ltang5@msu.edu

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John E. Simmons. *Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies*. 2nd edition. 2006; Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018.

Things Great and Small is a comprehensive and aptly titled book focusing on museum collections management policies. Revised from the original 2006 version, this second edition is informed by newer laws and regulations and considers emerging collections management practices and technologies. Author John E. Simmons is president of Museologica (a museum consulting company based in Pennsylvania), a lecturer in art at Juniata College, an instructor in museum studies at Kent State University, profesor invitado at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, an instructor for Museum Study LLC, and the adjunct curator of collections for the Earth and Mineral Sciences Museum and Art Gallery at Pennsylvania State University. His other recent publications include *Fluid Preservation: A Comprehensive Reference* (2014), *Foundations of Museum Studies: Evolving Systems of Knowledge* (2014, with Kiersten Latham), *Herpetological Collecting and Collections Management* (3rd edition, 2015), and *Museums: A History* (2016). With a strong background in natural history museum collections management and museum studies pedagogy, and as a former zookeeper, Simmons provides a book that is easy to read and interact with, and which is particularly informative for the administration of living and scientific collections.

This book is useful for students, museum collections managers/registrars, administrators, and collections management professionals in allied fields of all expertise levels and organization sizes. Across twenty chapters, Simmons walks the readers methodically through steps for crafting effective policies for their repositories. Appendices include a glossary, the American Alliance of Museums' Code of Ethics, the alliance's Accreditation Commission's Standards Regarding Collections Stewardship, and a section entitled "Laws and Regulations." Photographs enliven the text, tables provide clear visual rubrics for decision-making, examples in sections entitled "When Policy Meets Reality" offer entertaining mini-case studies for each chapter, and citations for other helpful resources conclude each chapter. The chapters are on average two to fourteen pages, supported by one to three sample policies, at least one table, and at least one "When Policy Meets Reality" example. Unique features for this resource, at least as compared to other such guides, include numerous sample policies by fictitious organizations that demonstrate how policies vary according to different types of organizations and the real-life examples of when reality and policy collide. The "When Policy Meets Reality" examples often feature unusual (or, sadly, all too common) scenarios rarely addressed in mainstream professional instruction, with topics ranging from combustible whale ovaries to sticky ethical morasses regarding loaning to private venues for fundraising events, making these sections thought-provoking conversation starters for a workshop or classroom setting.

The progression of chapters flows well—in fact, the organization closely corresponds to the American Alliance of Museums’ publication *Developing a Collection Management Policy*. This free online resource references the first edition of this book, among other titles, as a testimony to the author’s professional contributions to the field.

The coverage of topics seems thorough, although overviews naturally do not go deep, as particularly noted in the two-page digitization chapter (chapter 15). The writing itself appears to be fairly up to date, although some of the recommended resources at the end of each chapter may be older, usually ranging from 2007 to as early as the 1980s. The visual layout of the text is much improved from the first edition, though it can be challenging to leaf to particular chapters because a square icon for marking the beginnings of chapters is identical to that used for the various policy examples.

Although specifically addressing museum collections management, the book considers fundamental parallels to archival collections management. The museum-specific issues are well-explained for people unfamiliar with the field, and the book provides helpful clarification of commonly used terminology and its museum-specific meaning.

The first handful of chapters are especially helpful in guiding readers through the process and value of crafting policies. The author recommends avoiding simply copying policies from another organization or imposing policies without staff input, emphasizing the value of *the process* of crafting policies as a tool to clarify the mission, collecting priorities, functions, and goals of a particular institution.

The section on defining the scope and mission of collections is particularly applicable for archival settings. Interestingly, the author lists thirteen categories of collections, a division that may not officially be as common a practice within archives, although their functions and reasoning seem familiar. These include

- Collections held under a repository or management agreement: collections that a museum does not own but has a contractual arrangement for managing
- Education collections: objects intended for public programs, exhibition, demonstration, and experimentation that may not be officially accessioned because of their expendable nature
- Exhibition/display collections: objects of an impactful aesthetic or educational nature, anecdotally, objects of a fine quality but poor documentation of provenance, intended for exhibition and loans
- Exhibit prop collections
- Legacy collections: a tactful name for collections no longer in the scope of current collecting initiatives

In chapter 6, Simmons provides a helpful clarification between “acquisition” as something obtained by the institution and “accession” as the point when ownership is transferred. Other, more museum-specific practices include the differences (or not) between accessioning and registration. This also gets into the role of the registrar as similar or equivalent to collections manager. Tables include a helpful criteria for accessioning decisions, which is directly applicable for archivists and curators (48). The author describes requiring a collection impact statement as a useful tool to consider space, direct costs, staff time, supplies, and other expenses required to accession, keep, and maintain materials into the foreseeable future (51–52). This shifts the question from “Is this a good accession?” to “Is this the best acquisition given available resources?” A slight editorial note about collections management systems would be to include the mention of open-source CMS in addition to acknowledging commercially available products (57).

Deaccessions (chapter 7), although a healthy component to collections management, are fraught with hazards because of the public trust in which cultural heritage institutions are held. This chapter clearly identifies the risks, including public relations, donor relations, and even the danger of losing accreditation with the American Alliance of Museums, and provides helpful decision-making rubrics, case examples, and steps to take.

Other topics include the logistics, documentation, and procedures for loans; records management; collections care; access and use; risk management; intellectual property; and digitization. Chapter 9, “Objects in Custody,” considers a familiar headache for archivists of abandoned materials intended (but unsolicited) for donation. The summary of applicable laws and legislation in appendix C is particularly helpful. The related chapter, “Cultural Property” (chapter 16), scratches the surface by addressing the importance of provenance from a legal standpoint relating to the looting of Nazi artifacts and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), and shares examples of balancing standard museum practices with culturally appropriate traditional stewardship. However, this chapter (or at least its provided example) could stand to incorporate more of the regulations listed in appendix C to reinforce that a cultural property policy is not “complete” by acknowledging *only* Nazi artifacts and NAGPRA. Moreover, with recent global lawsuits regarding museum ownership of historically plundered objects, this topic is rapidly evolving.

In examining peer publications on museum collections management, I found plenty of resources on management and collections management, as well as in-depth explorations of issues such as the stewardship of culturally sensitive materials, but this book appears to be among only a handful of recent texts devoted entirely to *policies* relating to museum collections management. Recognizing the significance of policies as a starting point for action, *Things Great and Small* is a wide-ranging, useful resource and a worthy read.

