

**Guidelines Governing a Gift or Deposit of Organizational Records  
to the Massachusetts Historical Society  
May 2019**

1. Donating or depositing organizational records to the Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS) ensures that they are preserved in a secure environment and made accessible to researchers of all types. Typical MHS researchers include scholars, students, genealogists, filmmakers, and members of the general public. In exchange for making these materials available for research here, your organization can be assured that the records will be protected from destruction and theft in a secure, climate-controlled, fire-proof stack area and used under direct supervision in the Society's Reading Room.
2. Deposited papers and records remain the property of the owner. The MHS will temporarily return any or all items deposited at the written request of the president of your organization (or other appropriate party as determined by you). If items are returned to the owner on a temporary basis, the MHS would expect to receive a written request for them and notification of the length of time that those items will be unavailable for research at the MHS.
3. The MHS does not insure records placed on deposit (see sample deposit agreement below). Donated records are insured for treatment or repair in the unlikely event of a fire or flood.
4. The MHS collects papers and records to make them accessible for research. It may, however, in conjunction with, or at the request of, the organization, elect to close all or part of the records for a specified period of time. The MHS will require that all restrictions are lifted at some point in the future and will not act strictly as a storage facility. With the exception of officers of the club (to be specified as part of the deposit agreement) who have open access to the collection, the MHS will not provide unequal access by researchers, i.e. if a portion of the records are closed to one researcher, they are closed to all researchers.
5. The MHS may make selections from the collection before its transfer to the Society and/or may weed items from the collection during the accessioning or processing of the collection. The MHS will offer back to the organization any records it chooses not to accept and will discard or shred said materials only with the permission of the organization.
6. Researchers using collections work in a supervised reading room. Readers are asked to register in our online registration and request system and to show photographic identification for access to the collections. The MHS is open to the public at no charge on weekdays from 9 am to 4:45 pm, until 7:45 pm on Tuesday evenings, and on Saturdays from 9 am to 4 pm. Readers are allowed to examine one box or one volume of documents at a time, are required to use pencil and paper supplied by the Society only, and for security reasons, may not bring any folders or notebooks with them into the reading room. The reading room is monitored by both staff and security cameras.
7. The only charge researchers may incur is if they request photocopies or photographic copies from a collection. All copying is done by MHS staff and is authorized only when doing so will not compromise the condition of the original. Researchers are permitted to take digital photographs (without flash) in the Society's reading room.

8. Although a gift or deposit agreement would remain in effect for any subsequent additions to the collection (to prevent the organization from having to sign a new form every time something is added), a new agreement can be drawn up as needed for particular circumstances regarding access to or use of a specific part of a collection. An acknowledgment of the additions would be sent to the organization with each transfer of records.
9. A preliminary inventory of the collection will be created at the time of the initial transfer. The Historical Society cannot guarantee that materials in disarray can be protected in the Society's reading room. In order to protect the collection, records will remain closed to researchers until the MHS determines that they meet a minimum level of physical condition and arrangement and until we are sure that we have protected the privacy of individuals represented in any potentially sensitive documents.
10. The collection will eventually be "processed," that is, arranged according to professional and MHS archival standards and cataloged at the collection-level in the MHS online catalog, ABIGAIL. If the size of the collection warrants it, the collection will also be described in more detail in a narrative guide—a finding aid—available at the MHS website. For an example of an online finding aid to a collection of club records, see: <http://www.masshist.org/collection-guides/view/fa0077>. The catalog record in ABIGAIL will include a statement, to be agreed upon by the organization and MHS, as to how the collection should be cited by researchers in footnotes and bibliographies, e.g. The xxxx papers/records, property of the xxxx, on deposit at the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.
11. All or part of the collection may be stored in our secure, climate-controlled stacks or in a state-of-the art archival storage facility in Southborough, Mass. operated by Harvard University. Modern (i.e. 20<sup>th</sup> century) collections make up the bulk of the collections sent offsite. Collections stored offsite that are requested by researchers are delivered to the Historical Society the next business day.
12. While the acquisition of historically valuable research materials is central to the Historical Society's mission, the preservation, storage, organization, and description of manuscript collections are extremely costly (more detailed costs can be provided). While a financial contribution is not an absolute requirement, a donation to help offset processing costs does ensure that the collection will be processed and made available to researchers in a more timely manner.
13. Organizational records often include multiple copies of a number of publications, such as annual reports, bulletins, newsletters, and other printed memorabilia. If these materials are included in the collection, it is our practice to preserve no more than two "archival" copies of each printed item. We will return or discard, with permission of the organization, any extra copies that we receive as part of the collection or in further additions to the records. We also may determine that some secondary materials do not have enduring historical value. In that instance, we would offer back to the organization any materials that we do not wish to keep. The MHS does not accept books, pamphlets, or other printed materials that duplicate existing holdings.

14. Records are stored in acid-free boxes and folders and may undergo other basic preservation methods (the removal of metal paper clips and staples, for example) as they are processed.
15. The Society can make copies of records of special interest for use by the organization if the condition of the original material will not be compromised by doing so. Extensive photocopying (hundreds of documents or pages) is time-consuming and expensive. If the organization needs extensive copies, the MHS would expect it to underwrite the cost.
16. The MHS does not digitize collections as a matter of course. Digitization is time-consuming and very costly. Subvention of costs will be necessary for collections to be digitized.

I hope this information is helpful. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can answer any questions. I can be reached at my direct line, 617/646-0502, or via email at [blawson@masshist.org](mailto:blawson@masshist.org).

Brenda M. Lawson  
Vice President for Collections

# SAMPLE

## FORM OF DEPOSIT TO THE SOCIETY

[Organization name], whose address is xxxxxxxxxxxx, hereby deposits with the MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, a corporation organized under the laws of Massachusetts, [collection name]. In consideration of the acceptance of this deposit by said SOCIETY for storage and safekeeping, I hereby agree that the SOCIETY may make and keep photographic and other copies of any of the articles thus deposited, and that such articles and copies may be open to inspection under the general rules of the SOCIETY, and publication of said articles may be made or authorized by the SOCIETY at its discretion.

It is understood as part of this deposit agreement that the MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY in accepting the deposit of the articles specified incurs no liability for loss or damage, and assumes no obligation to insure said articles.

In Witness Whereof, I, the said

\_\_\_\_\_

(Name)

(Title)

hereto set my hand this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 201\_.

\_\_\_ Please check here if you do not want your name to appear as a donor in MHS publications or announcements

# SAMPLE

## FORM OF GIFT TO THE SOCIETY

I/We, xxxxxxx, whose address is xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, hereby deliver and transfer to the MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, a corporation organized under the laws of Massachusetts, all my right, title, and interest in and to the articles described below, including all literary rights therein.

In Witness Whereof, I, the said

\_\_\_\_\_ hereto set my hand this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 201\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(signature)

*Collection name  
(and subsequent additions to the collection)*

\_\_\_ Please check here if you do not want your name to appear as a donor in MHS publications or announcements