

Historical Museum at Fort Missoula

EXHIBIT POLICY

MISSION

The mission of the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula is to keep Missoula County's history alive for the education and enjoyment of the public.

VISION

The Historical Museum at Fort Missoula is dedicated to increasing the knowledge and understanding of the history of the county and city of Missoula, the history of Fort Missoula and the military presence in the area, and the history of forest management and the wood products industry in western Montana. Through an aggressive program of collections, exhibits, educational opportunities and special events, the Museum seeks to stimulate creative thought and enhance the self-esteem of residents of and visitors to Missoula, providing a sense of place, time and space for all.

To that end, insofar as its resources permit, the Museum collects, preserves and interprets objects and informational materials related to the exploration, founding and evolution of the community and county of Missoula, the development of Fort Missoula and the myriad aspects of the military presence in the area, and of the history of forest management and the wood products industry. The Museum collects, preserves and interprets objects from the period of the earliest exploration to the present in order to present a coherent and total picture. These objects and informational materials are made available for study and enjoyment of all, in a pleasant, secure, safe and accessible setting.

EXHIBIT PHILOSOPHY

Exhibits at the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula are intended to address three major themes: to increase the knowledge and understanding of the historical significance of the growth and development of Missoula, to investigate the various implications of the military presence at Fort Missoula, and to present the myriad ramifications of forest management and the timber industry in Missoula and Western Montana.

Special consideration is given to exhibits that:

- make primary resources and current scholarship accessible to the general public;
- increase the involvement of special interest groups;
- provide visitors with the critical skills to interpret primary materials and encourage self-directed learning;
- encourage people to return to the museum; and
- broaden visitors' understanding of the diverse nature of the significance of Fort Missoula, Missoula and Western Montana.

The museum views itself as a catalyst in the learning process and its exhibits as public forums in which knowledge is shared and exchanged. Categories of exhibits include:

- exhibits in which the museum's staff develops an idea for an exhibit using primarily the

museum's own collections and which is curated by an appropriate staff member;

- cooperative exhibits in which the lender provides a major portion of a specific collection and the museum's staff conducts and/or supervises the research, interpretation and design;
- exhibits initiated by an organization or individual who, to an appropriate degree, produces the exhibit under museum supervision; and
- traveling exhibits circulated by another institution or an exhibit service.

AUTHORITY

Jurisdiction over all decisions regarding exhibits, including choosing the subject, shall rest with the museum staff, organized as a Staff Exhibit Committee and consisting of the Museum Director, the Senior Curator, the Education Curator, and any other staff member selected for the specific exhibit.

This committee shall

- develop goals for each exhibit;
- determine the desired audience;
- develop a list of project elements, including dates, publicity and resources;
- organize an opening reception;
- establish a long-range exhibits' calendar to guarantee an orderly and rational schedule of changing exhibits;
- determine the appropriateness of each exhibit on the grounds of its adherence to the museum's mission, the importance of the subject and the availability of primary material;
- establish a budget for the entire process; and
- assess the effectiveness of each exhibit.

INSTALLATION

Each exhibit has one "Exhibit Curator" designated by the Director as soon as an exhibit topic has been decided upon by the Staff Exhibit Committee. This Exhibit Curator, generally the Senior Curator, designates a working committee and will delegate responsibility accordingly to appropriate members of the museum's staff, interns, volunteers or project consultants. While maintaining general oversight of the entire process, the Exhibit Curator will delineate clear subsets of responsibility that specify task, time limits and cost. All persons with responsibilities for the exhibit will meet at regular intervals.

Exhibits shall be installed in a manner that demonstrates concern for the appearance of the exhibit and the safety and preservation of the artifacts. Exhibit materials shall be kept clean and properly illuminated in the most appropriately controlled environment. Regular checks shall be made to insure that these standards are continuously maintained throughout the duration of each exhibit. Adequate space for visitor traffic and educational activities in accordance with thematic development shall always be a consideration in the planning and installation of any exhibit.

SECURITY/PRESERVATION

Protection of objects displayed shall always take precedence over aesthetic advantage in display whenever the two concerns are not compatible. Human and natural hazards shall be elements of equal concern.

BUDGET

The budget for each exhibit will be written as part of the initial planning process and will minimally include line items for design, construction, conservation, preservation, security,

interpretation, programming, promotion, publication, dismantling, evaluation, etc.

EVALUATION

Evaluation is an ongoing process, concurrent with the entire exhibit process. It shall be undertaken by a designated member of the museum team or by an outside consultant. Evaluation components will try to include front-end, formative, and remedial testing.

SCHEDULE

Due to limited resources (staff, financial, time, etc.), a major exhibit will open each year in the Heath Gallery. The Main Gallery will present the development of Missoula as a community as an educational tool for visitors and school children. The foyer will be available for changing exhibits and new acquisitions throughout the year, as determined by the Staff Exhibit Committee. The North Gallery exhibit will feature traveling and short-term exhibits, and be used for collections-related activities during “down” times.

ACCESSIBILITY

All exhibits shall be constructed to provide maximum accessibility for the physically handicapped according to ADA standards. Exhibits which cannot be made accessible due to the physical limitations of the buildings will be made accessible through appropriate alternative methods, i.e., video and/or catalogs.

Approved by Board of Trustees, September 19, 1991: Geoffrey Sutton, Chair; Gail Bromenshenk,
Roger Bergmeier

Revised and accepted by Board of Trustees, September 21, 1998: Robert Tutskey, Chair; Beverly
Kiker; Ernest Dewey; Michael Fussell (Alternate); Gary Johnson (Alternate)

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