

# COLLECTING POLICY FOR NIAGARA REGIONAL ARCHIVE

*New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and  
Historic Preservation*

NIAGARA REGION

## **Definition**

Niagara Falls has long been a place that has attracted visitors from all over the world. As a result, the Niagara Falls State Park plays a unique role in the history of the Niagara region. Before Niagara Falls was designated as a park, its surroundings were dominated by mills and industries that crowded the shoreline. These mills imposed a fee for visitors who wished to view the falls from the American side. With the idea that the Falls should be free for all, a collection of early minded conservationists, including Frederick Law Olmstead, created a group known as the "Free Niagara" movement in the late 1860s. The movement advocated for the protection of the land surrounding the Falls from commercial exploitation and ensuring it remained accessible to the public. In 1885, the group was successful in their efforts and the Niagara Appropriations Bill was signed into law, creating the State Reservation at Niagara. Thomas V. Welch, New York State Assemblyman, and a leader of the "Free Niagara" movement played a key role in getting the bill signed, and later served as the first superintendent of the park.

Frederick Law Olmstead and his business partner, Calvert Vaux, created the landscape which included clearing out structures that blocked views along the upper rapids limiting factories, and creating a network of footpaths through wooded areas and along riverbanks.

Following the creation of Niagara Falls as a State Park in New York, it remained, and continues to remain, an iconic destination for travelers from all over the world. Stunters continued to flock to the area to prove their skills with all kinds of daring acts including tightrope walking, going over in barrels, and more. The power industry took a great interest in the area in the development of hydroelectric power plants. Nikola Tesla's AC induction motor in 1896 enabled long-distance transmission from the hydroelectric power plant to Buffalo, NY, making Niagara Falls a hotspot for industrialization in the area. Niagara Falls remains free to visit and the park emphasizes the natural beauty of the Falls and public accessibility for all.

The Niagara Regional Archive is located in the Niagara Falls State Park. The majority of the materials currently housed at the archive are materials directly related to Niagara Falls State Park. These items were created by the region and collected by the parks but also includes donations by people outside of the parks as well. In addition to Niagara Falls State Park, the Niagara Region includes 18 parks and two historic sites. Parks include the Niagara Falls State Park, Artpark State Park (Earl W. Brydges), Beaver Island State Park, Big Six Mile Creek Marina, Buckhorn Island State Park, Buffalo Harbor State Park, DeVeaux Woods State Park, Devil's Hole State Park, Evangola State Park, Fort Niagara State Park, Four Mile Creek State Park, Golden Hill State Park, Joseph Davis State Park, Knox Farm State Park, Reservoir State Park, Whirlpool State Park, Wilson-Tuscarora State Park, and Woodlawn Beach State Park. The two historic sites in the region are the Darwin Martin House State Historic Site and Old Fort Niagara State Historic Site.

Moving forward, if there are materials or collections that are housed at regional parks in which there are concerns about their safety, security, or preservation, they may be moved to the regional archive for storage and to ensure items will be preserved. If collections can be housed at their specific sites safely, and without concerns for future preservation of the materials, it would be preferred that they remain in their current location.

## **I. Mission**

The Niagara Regional Archives of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation works to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the Niagara Region and to provide visitors with a fuller understanding of the historical events, activities, and material culture associated with the region.

## **II. Vision**

The Niagara Regional Archive works towards enriching people's lives by helping them to understand New York's past, to appreciate the present, and to embrace the future. The goal is to preserve objects closely associated with the history of Niagara Regional Parks and their park-specific activities. The archive will accomplish its mission by:

- i. Providing long-term preservation of objects and materials by maintaining established standards of the acquisition, care, and management of its collections.
- ii. Increase knowledge, inspiration, and an awareness of preservation and stewardship among present and future generations through the effective use of outreach which includes, but is not limited to exhibits, programs, and research.
- iii. Increase accessibility to the collections by working toward the cataloging of all objects found in the collections throughout the region.

## **III. Scope**

The scope of the collections are items housed at Niagara Regional Archive in the Niagara Falls State Park. This collection consists of a mixture of items created by the region during the administration of the sites and items donated from the community. Items collected and stored will directly correlate to the parks within the regional boundaries of the Niagara Region. Currently, most of the collections relate directly to the Niagara Falls State Park, though more parks materials from the region may be added as parks collections are evaluated.

## ***PERIODS OF COLLECTING***

The collection for Niagara Regional Archive will be historic, artistic, and archival material in the following categories:

- i. Prehistoric-1850s: Emphasis on the time before the start of the advocacy for Niagara Falls State Park. Inclusion of materials connected to the indigenous peoples of the region and other areas of interest including the Underground Railroad and power industry within the boundaries of Niagara Falls State Park.
- ii. 1860s-1900: The founding of the parks and the resulting tourism and industry that evolved from that time. Emphasis on 1869-1900, with the official opening of the State Reservation at Niagara in 1885. Includes original documents and materials.
- iii. Early-1900s - Mid-1900s: Period when the parks continued to be built and established, documenting changes to lands, etc.

- iv. Niagara Regional Archive will also continue to collect modern-day type material (1960s-present) as it pertains to documenting preservation, development, and use of the parks.
- v. Niagara Regional Archive will also collect items for the historic, artistic, and archival collections for all of the Niagara Regional parks. Specific focus will be on those items that reflect the preservation, development, and use of the parks.

### **STATEMENT OF COLLECTIONS**

Niagara Regional Archive only collects items relating to sites within the geographical boundaries of the Niagara Region or those items which help to show the growth and development of the regional parks.

Items must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- a. Be of permanent historical value.
- b. Be worthy of long-term preservation.
- c. Be considered unique and/or irreplaceable.
- d. Fits into the scope and collecting policy themes.

Niagara Regional Archive seeks donations and acquisitions that are historical collections related to the history, preservation, adaptation, and interpretation of the Niagara Falls State Park. Themes that will be the focus include the direct connection to the Niagara Falls State Park:

- i. Collections relating to the founding of and advocacy for the creation of the Niagara Falls State Park, including the individuals involved in the Free Niagara movement and the direct correlation to their advocacy efforts.
- ii. Tourism- The connection to historic hotels and tourist activity (i.e., Cataract House, Cave of the Winds, Maid of the Mist, etc.)
- iii. Hydroelectric Power and the effect on Niagara Falls (environment, cultural, historic)
- iv. Underground Railroad and Niagara Falls
- v. Connection of the Indigenous Peoples to Niagara Falls, with a focus on the Haudenosaunee people. Objects related to the local Indigenous Peoples' culture relating directly to the area of the parks within the boundaries of Niagara Regional Archives, including archeological artifacts (subject to NAGPRA).
- vi. The City of Niagara Falls and the connection to the Niagara regional parks.
- vii. Connections to the land and what it was used for before it became a state park, i.e., Schoellkopf Hall in DeVeaux is a building that remains standing. Connections to the history of that building and the history to the school would be relevant to collections in the history of that park.

The Collection can be split into five categories: Special Collections Archival Collections, Historic Collections, Archaeological Collections, Reference Materials Collection, and Museum Interpretive Objects/Equipment Collection. Materials that will be collected and preserved are those that have a direct association with the region and will be included in the archive's collection. If there are duplicates, only the best-preserved examples will be kept.

- i. **Special Collections Archival** consist of mainly primary source materials and records that document Regional Parks activity throughout time. These materials may include original documents, manuscripts, photographs, negatives, slides, reports, maps, and more to be added in the future, including the possible addition of oral histories and non-published digital materials that are intrinsically historically valuable in nature.
- ii. **Historic Collections** consist of objects, also known as artifacts, which are distinguished from archival materials by defining them as three-dimensional items. Items that fall in this category include historical objects, paintings, frames, art, tools, and more. Focus will be on original artifacts as opposed to mass-produced items unless they were produced by the parks.

Historic Collections also includes natural history specimens which may include herbarium and geological materials. Specimens are collected as a sample of a region's natural and cultural environment and can represent the environment from the past or the present.

- iii. **Archaeological Collections** are those materials acquired through the lawful excavation of sites in the Niagara Region area. Collection of these materials should be done by only those who are researchers on projects specifically mentioned with the Parks and sites or by archaeologists on special projects.

Archaeological materials are those that are excavated or removed during an archaeological examination. Archaeological materials are objects created or modified by humans. It also may include the associated records that are prepared or assembled in connection with the survey, excavation, or other study.

Archaeological artifacts excavated from a park or historic site are automatically the property of the State and do not need to be formally accepted.<sup>1</sup>

- iv. **Reference Materials Collection:** A small number of materials have been collected and retained by the Niagara Regional Archive for reference and will not be included in the archival or museum collections. Rare books and original manuscripts will continue to be included in the museum collection. Reference materials generally refer to library and mass-printed materials (such as newspaper and magazines). The library and printed matter in the museum collection both support the park's research, interpretive, and resource management programs. These materials will not leave the archives except for interagency use but will be available for use within the archives building. Materials that fall into this category will be carefully collected. Only materials that are deemed exceptionally important to research needs will be collected moving forward. Items classified as reference are not subject to the same standards of care that pertain to museum objects. They will primarily be maintained

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<sup>1</sup> HP-POL-007

for the purposes of research but hold no inherent or intrinsic value outside of the written information that will be able to be found elsewhere.

- v. **Museum Interpretive Object/Equipment Collection** materials are classified as equipment acquired for the purposes of historic interpretation. Examples include reproductions of historic firearms, furnishings, and objects along with commonly available historical objects that lack significance as museum objects. Items classified as museum interpretive equipment are not subject to the same standards of care that pertain to museum objects; however, they are managed and tracked as assets in the same manner as museum collections<sup>2</sup>.

#### **IV. Conditions for Acquisition:**

Museum objects must be acquired by purchase, donation, or transfer. For any questions about acquisitions, please refer to HP-POL-007 for a complete list of what will and will not be accepted by the Collections Committee and Niagara Regional Archive.

Objects offered for donation to Niagara Regional Archives which do not fall into the areas delineated above will be given consideration for appropriateness to the collections of other New York State Historic Parks, sites, or facilities— if such consideration is acceptable to the donor. Should a proffered object be declined, suggestions of other local museums or historical societies or more appropriate institutions may be made to guide the donor in finding a repository that might want and be able to give adequate preservation to the objects.

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<sup>2</sup> HP-POL-007