

Preserving City of Waukesha Christmas Parade Memorial

Scope of Collections Statement:

The intent of this Scope of Collections Statement is to document the collections processes undertaken by the Waukesha County Historical Society & Museum, define the types of collections, restrictions, and describe the collections management practices employed for the accession of the Christmas Parade Memorial collection.

Summary

In the days following the tragic incident at the 2021 Christmas Parade, the City of Waukesha (City) identified Veterans Park as the site for a temporary community memorial. Over the subsequent weeks community members left tribute items in honor and memory of the victims of the parade tragedy.

Veterans Park is conceived and intended as a public space of remembrance and is in immediate geographic proximity to the Main Street corridor, the primary parade route and site of the incident. For these reasons, the use of Veterans Park satisfied the common practice of locating memorials of roadway incidents and loss of life at or very nearly at the location of occurrence. It likewise followed the model of treating ad hoc roadway memorials as temporary displays subject to removal based on considerations including duration, weather, and public safety impacts. Beyond the identification of the site by the City, the memorial composition was not directed or actively managed by any single entity. In this way it served as a dynamic community informed site of remembrance.

Practically items left at the memorial are considered voluntarily abandoned property by the City and not subject to review as municipal records under Wis. Stat 16.61(4) nor Wis. Stat 19.21. As such, the City engaged the professional services of the Waukesha County Historical Society & Museum (WCHSM) to evaluate, remove, and review for conservation the tribute materials into the WCHSM permanent collections. The WCHSM will act as the repository, in perpetuity, then for these items otherwise known as the Christmas Parade Memorial (CPM) collection.

The WCHSM is an independent repository for the material culture and archival materials for the region, held in the public trust. The WCHSM's Collection Management Policy outlines in full the guideline for accession of materials into the permanent collections.¹ The CPM collection will be subject to review pursuant to these guidelines, including conservation assessment as a significant factor for declining acceptance of materials.

The CPM collection preserved at the WCHSM is intended to serve as a representative sample of the tribute offerings made by community members. In addition to the physical items preserved the memorial will undergo photographic documentation in situ as an act of preservation for memorial's composition. This documentation, along with other archival items will be preserved as part of the larger CPM collection.

¹ Collection Management Policy. Approved 2002, last reviewed 2020. Institutional Records, RC2., Waukesha County Historical Society & Museum Archives Collection. Waukesha, WI.

WCHSM Collections Processing Approach

The WCHSM in consultation and collaboration with the City, will lead the documentation of the memorial site at Veterans park, evaluation of materials for preservation, recovery and processing of items from Veteran's Park, and finally accessioning of the CPM collection into the WCHSM's permanent artifact and archival collection. The WCHSM will also consult with Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) staff, and engage the services of professional conservators as deemed necessary through conservation assessment.

1. Documentation of the Site

Purpose: Create a visual record of the memorial site as constructed by the community at Veterans Park. Outputs of this documentation include:

- Photographic prints and/or digital originals accessioned into the CPM collection at WCHSM
- Visual media to be used by the City and/or WCHSM for the creation of a virtual memorial site

The documentation of the site will include several preliminary visits to document both the dynamic nature of the memorial, but also inform the determination of the end date for the memorial. The City and WCHSM will work collaboratively at the close of the memorial to ensure that all wanted photo documentation is completed before removal of materials begins.

2. Material Evaluation of Memorial

Purpose: understand the potential conservation needs of items collected for inclusion in the CPM collection, and identify those material types that are outside the scope of reasonable conservation intervention as determined by the WCHSM.

The tribute items left by community members that comprise the CPM collection are expected and typical in material types based on examples of similar public memorial sites. These include:

Organic matter: flowers and greenery, predominately cut and susceptible to significant and immediate deterioration especially in outdoor exposures.

Textiles: predominately synthetic fibers as found in stuffed animals, as well as garment textiles including personal accessories and outer layer clothing. Susceptible to water damage and pose risk to other items in collection without conservation treatment at the time of accession.

Wood: substrate to six painted crosses with ink overwriting, and one larger memorial cross. Relatively durable to outdoor exposure.

Glass: prayers candles and rosary beads, relatively durable to outdoor exposure.

Paper: signs, posters, cards, and messages left in commemoration. Will require treatment at acquisition to be preserved. Range of paper types, trending towards card stock or cardboard. Susceptible to significant damage from outdoor exposure and requiring significant intervention at accession for successful preservation.

Plastic: Mixed polymer types common on toys and memorabilia. Additional types polymer types common to faux greenery and flowers, in addition to protective sleeves or wrapping on other memorial items.

The Christmas Parade Memorial at Veterans Park was conceived and created as a temporary site of remembrance. Community members contributed memorial items at will, and in understanding that they may not be preserved beyond the expected lifespan of the material. Organic materials, including cut flowers and greenery the most frequent example of limited lifespan materials, and pose a significant risk to the overall collection over time. Therefore, organic materials cannot be accessioned as part of the CPM collection. Recognizing this and other limitations of volume and reasonable conservation, it is not the intent of the collection process to preserve each item left at the memorial. Rather the CPM collection will be representative of the temporary memorial, with conservation interventions focused on those items that have clear connection to the parade, victims, organizations involved, and the City of Waukesha.

3. Recovery and Processing

Purpose: To bring the temporary memorial into an environmentally controlled space, and conduct a full condition assessment and conservation treatment plan at the WCHSM.

The WCHSM will coordinate with the City and lead the recovery of the memorial items at Veterans Park. A Temporary Custody Receipt will be completed to begin the process of documentation for accession from the City to the WCHSM. All items will be brought to the Waukesha State Bank Education Center at the WCHSM for processing. Items will be evaluated following the WCHSM's Collections Management Policy and informed by best practices. Condition reports will be completed as necessary for items. WCHSM staff and volunteers, led by Executive Director Bonnie Byrd, will follow best practices in handling and cleaning all materials.

Appropriate techniques and materials will be used in the processing of the CPM Collection. Ongoing conservation care will be incorporated into WCHSM's annual budget and become part of annual donor appeals for support. The immediate costs of conservation and storage will require ad hoc fundraising to purchase the necessary materials.

4. Accessioning

Purpose: To complete the transfer, through donation, of the CPM Collection to the WCHSM.

After the condition assessment and conservation intervention the WCHSM will provide a finalized Deed of Gift for the City of Waukesha detailing the full range of materials to be accessioned into the WCHSM's permanent collection. Any materials deemed beyond the scope of conservation intervention will likewise be documented as outside the scope of the accessioned CPM collection, and appropriately disposed of.

All artifact and archival objects in the WCHSM's collection are held in the public trust, and made available to the public through exhibition and research request. The WCHSM does not guarantee however, permanent public exhibition of any materials over time.