

## APPENDIX C: CODES OF ETHICS

Numerous professional organizations have adopted codes of ethics to guide the work of their members. Such codes are useful references and serve to protect both individuals and institutions when there are allegations of unethical behavior. The Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) provides guidance to conservators in the ethical practice of conservation. Professional associates and fellows of AIC agree to abide by this code. However, Departmental policy extends the application of these principles and procedures to all conservation treatments, regardless of a practitioner's professional status or affiliations. The Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (A) and A Code of Ethics for Archivists (B) are reproduced here. Other useful codes are available from the American Association of Museums. (C)

### A. AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR CONSERVATION CODE OF ETHICS AND STANDARDS OF PRACTICE FOR CONSERVATORS

With the permission of the American Institute of Conservation, a copy of the Code of Ethics for Conservators is included in this section. Much of the material in this Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice is discussed in Chapter 10.

Part One - Code of Ethics consists of statements of basic principles. There are "obligations to historic and artistic works", as well as responsibilities in professional relationships with other people.

The list of "obligations" begins by stating the following fundamental principle: **"All professional actions of the conservator are governed by unswerving respect for the esthetic, historic and physical integrity of the object."** The conservator should attempt to find and use techniques and materials that leave objects intact and uncompromised as much as possible, and preserve the features that characterize them as esthetic, historic, or scientific objects. The other "obligations" follow from this principle. The "single standard", for example, states that treatment should always be "consistent with the conservator's respect for the integrity of the objects", regardless of the value of the

objects, the number being treated, or the extent of treatment that is appropriate in the circumstances.

Part Two - Standards of Practice outlines appropriate procedures for carrying out scientific analytical studies of objects and for documenting, examination and treatment, including what is required in contractual relationships. Safety concerns, for both conservators and objects, are also covered.

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**B. SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS CODE OF ETHICS FOR ARCHIVISTS**

A Code of Ethics for Archivists has been prepared by the Society of American Archivists (SAA). A copy of this code of ethics is reprinted in this appendix by permission of the Society of American Archivists.

Society of American Archivists  
**A CODE OF ETHICS FOR ARCHIVISTS**

Archivists select, preserve, and make available records and papers that have lasting value to the organization or public that the archivist serves. Archivists perform their responsibilities in accordance with statutory authorization or institutional policy. They subscribe to a code of ethics based on sound archival principles and promote institutional and professional observance of these ethical and archival standards.

Archivists arrange transfers of records and acquire papers in accordance with their institutions' purposes and resources. They do not compete for acquisitions when competition would endanger the integrity or safety of records and papers; they cooperate to ensure the preservation of these materials in repositories where they will be adequately processed and effectively utilized.

Archivists negotiating with transferring officials or owners of papers seek fair decisions based on full consideration of authority to transfer, donate, or sell; financial arrangements and benefits; copyright; plans for processing; and, conditions of access. Archivists discourage unreasonable restrictions on access or use, but may accept as a condition of acquisition clearly stated restrictions of limited duration and may occasionally suggest such restrictions to protect privacy. Archivists observe

faithfully all agreements made at the time of transfer or acquisition.

Archivists appraise records and papers with impartial judgment based on thorough knowledge of their institutions' administrative requirements or acquisitions policies. They arrange records and papers selected for retention in conformity with sound archival principles and as rapidly as their resources permit. Archivists protect the integrity of records and papers in their custody, guarding them against defacement, alteration, theft, and physical damage, and ensure that their evidentiary value is not impaired in the archival work of restoration, arrangement, and use. They cooperate with other archivists and law enforcement agencies in the apprehension and prosecution of thieves.

Archivists respect the privacy of individuals who created or are the subjects of records and papers, especially those who had no voice in the disposition of the materials. They neither revel nor profit from information gained through work with restricted holdings.

Archivists answer courteously and with a spirit of helpfulness all reasonable inquiries about their holdings, and encourage use of them to the greatest extent compatible with institutional policies, preservation of holdings, legal considerations, individual rights, donor agreements, and judicious use of archival resources. They explain pertinent restrictions to potential users, and apply them equitably.

Archivists endeavor to inform users of parallel research by others using the same materials, and, if the individuals concerned agree, supply each name to the other party.

Archivists may use their institutions' holdings for personal research and publication if such practices are approved by their employers and are made known to others using the same holdings. Archivists may review and comment on the works of others in their fields, including works based on research in their own institutions. Archivists who collect manuscripts personally should not compete for acquisitions within their own repositories, should inform their employers of their collecting activities, and should preserve complete records of personal acquisitions.

Archivists avoid irresponsible criticism of other archivists or institutions and address complaints about professional or ethical conduct to the individual or institution concerned, or to a professional archival organization.

Archivists share knowledge and experience with other archivists through professional activities and assist the professional growth of others with less training or experience.

Archivists work for the best interests of their institutions and their profession and endeavor to reconcile any conflicts by encouraging adherence to archival standards and ethics.

#### **C. AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS**

The AAM code of ethics for curators, for example, establishes standards for appropriate curatorial behavior and identifies critical, frequently controversial issues such as acquisition and disposal, appraisals, personal collecting, buying and selling, field collecting, ownership of scholarly materials, and the broader area of conflict of interest. A reprint of this code is available from the American Association of Museums. It should be reviewed periodically, and kept close at hand for ready reference.

A Professional Code of Ethics Museum News Reprint Package is available from the American Association of Museums for \$15 (\$12.50 for AAM members; order number LHL750; quantity discounts are available). Its articles include codes of ethics for curators, conservators, registrars, and museum stores. Send orders to: American Association of Museums, 1575 Eye St. N.W. Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20005. Orders may also be placed by phone (voice: 202-289-9127 [credit card orders only]; fax: 202-289-6578 [credit card or institutional purchase order]). The AAM Federal ID # is 53-020-5889. Prices and availability are subject to change without notice.