

Selected Acquisitions

American Identity and Acquisitions

Over the past year, the Museum has collected a wide variety of objects, broadening and deepening its documentation of America's past. Of particular significance are acquisitions that address the Museum's American Identity initiative. This initiative embraces our diverse individual and cultural identities as well as our collective national and civic identity. The exploration of American Identity does not propose a single identity for the American people but considers multiple identities, how those identities shape America, and what it means to be an American.

This tension between civic and cultural identities is reflected in our acquisitions. For example, the Division of Science, Medicine, and Society collected a number of objects for the *Disability Rights Movement* showcase that opened this past summer. These objects not only represent the struggle of the disabled to gain full citizenship, but also help us understand what it has meant historically to be a member of this group—to be ignored and denied identity. Objects collected this year include contraband keys made by psychiatric patients at the Winnebago Mental Health Institute, white canes used by blind individuals (including one for a child), and a t-shirt that proclaims "I am not a case, and I don't need to be managed!"

A similar intersection of civic and cultural identities plays out in the Vernon Torrence Collection. Acquired by the Archives Center, this collection of the papers of a WWII conscientious objector addresses the contested meaning of citizenship and patriotism, and the conflict between civic identity and personal identity and values. Rather than serve in the military, Torrence, the son of a minister, performed alternative service primarily at a logging camp in the western United States and briefly as part of a medical experiment on jaundice.



The collections reflect more than just cultural identities—new acquisitions also explore other facets of American Identity. Consider the sub-themes under American Identity:

A Sense of Place

The Division of the History of Technology acquired a collection of tobacco farm implements—tobacco spears, tobacco sticks, a tobacco marketing basket—and other objects that document this disappearing activity in rural Maryland.

Business and Work

The Division of Cultural History and the Archives Center jointly collected materials from Binney and Smith, the makers of Silly Putty—one of America's great products—and an American business success story. The collection includes papers and a large double-handled chop knife used at the Easton, Pennsylvania, factory to cut large masses of putty into 50-pound billets.

Leisure and Entertainment

Newly collected objects include the James Whitmore Collection of items from the American actor's one-man *Will Rogers* play and a 1941 Indian brand motorcycle acquired by the Division of the History of Technology that reflects the popularity of recreational motorcycling during the Depression and early years of World War II.

Creating Community

The role of religion in creating community is illustrated in a variety of recently acquired religious objects, such as an 1892 *Book of Common Prayer*. This topic also encompasses the creation of civic community, as illustrated by such diverse objects as a 1948 Hawkeye Boys State t-shirt from Iowa and a collection of emergency medical equipment issued by the California Fire Service in the 1970s.



Generations

This sub-theme explores family, stages of life, and other related topics. New acquisitions include a Louisiana girl's homespun cotton dress from 1865–1875, the Young family's home movies from the mid-1930s, a boy's Roy Rogers shirt from 1949, and a woman's patched jeans from 1969–1975.

Global Connections

This past year, the Archives Center and the Division of Cultural History jointly collected material from Goya Foods, a family-owned, New Jersey-based company specializing in Latino foods, with plants in Spain, the Dominican Republic, and the United States.

Quest for Knowledge

New acquisitions range from a Spitz Junior Planetarium dating from the early 1950s (when Americans were becoming interested in outer space, rockets, and astronomy), to oral history interviews with the Archives Center as part of the Lemelson Center's *Innovative Lives* program.

Top: Photo advertisement from the Goya Foods Collection
Center: 1892 Ivory Book of Common Prayer
Bottom: Button from the Disability Rights Movement showcase



The acquisitions listed are examples of the 9,536 objects collected by the Museum in the 2000 fiscal year.

