

Deaccessioning 101

Vicky Spalding shows how tackling the thorny issue of deaccessioning items from museum collections can bring positive benefits.

REALITY AND RATIONALE

In an ideal world there would be no need to remove items permanently from museum collections. However, a variety of factors, such as poorly defined collection policies, lack of systematic collecting, pressure on storage space and limited funding, can create situations where deaccessioning becomes necessary.

In a previous article for *Te Ara* (Spalding, 2005), I discussed the issues of deaccessioning from having studied the theory as a student volunteering at the New Zealand National Maritime to the reality of going through the process at the same institution where I am currently the Registrar. Here I report on more recent instances of deaccessioning that ultimately achieved good outcomes.

CHARTING A COURSE

The New Zealand National Maritime Museum is unique in that it is home to a large and varied collection of boats. These range from windsurfers to tiny P Class yachts, to 32ft long, 28ft wide ocean-going double-hulled wakes. Storage of such vessels can be problematic and space is always an ongoing issue. However, some of the vessels in the collection were duplicates, others were

poor examples of their type, while others were simply not relevant to our collection policy.

The procedure of going through the deaccessioning process was quite straight-forward for some objects. In most cases, we knew who the donors were and made contact to advise them that we intended to remove their vessel from the collection. Under our deaccessioning policy, the donors of artefacts are given first right of refusal to have their objects returned to them. One vessel that I wanted to deaccession was an old plywood X Class yacht, which had no known provenance and was in poor condition. Moreover, I had recently acquired an X Class of the same vintage, but it was in superb condition, had excellent documentation and is considered important to the yachting history of New Zealand. The deaccessioning of the old X Class was simple. I was able to contact the donor, he was happy to have the vessel returned and he understood why it was no longer required for the collection. Thus, the unwanted X Class was duly returned to the original owner.

NOT ALL PLAIN SAILING

What was I going to do with boats if the owners did not want them back? Few museums in New Zealand collect vessels, so an exchange or gift with another institution was going to be unlikely. I decided to advertise through Museums Aotearoa and the Auckland Yacht & Boating Association. The response from the Museums Aotearoa advertisement was surprising. Rather than just other museums wanting vessels, I received queries from a number of individuals who had seen the advertisement which had been passed onto them by friends or family in the museum industry.

A Seacraft 18ft runabout and a small speedboat were eventually transferred to the Classic Yacht Association. These vessels were in an 'as is, where is' condition and the Museum already owned other examples of Seacraft vessels and speedboats. Both of the deaccessioned vessels have been since been restored and are now used for the Association's events.

GOOD THINGS TAKE TIME

One particularly successful outcome was the gift of a ships' boat to Waipu Museum in Northland. A ships' boat

is a boat used to transport people from ship to shore. They were also used as boats to transport goods and for fishing. The New Zealand National Maritime Museum had been gifted a 17ft ships' boat in 1991 by the Museum of Transport and Technology (MOTAT) in Auckland. This boat had no provenance, it was damaged and in poor condition. These factors determined that it was an eligible candidate for deaccessioning. In 2002 the boat was formally deaccessioned from our collection and duly approved by the Trust Board. In 2005, it was eventually gifted to Waipu Museum. Waipu Museum had seen the advertisement through Museums Aotearoa and they were looking for a suitable boat for the redevelopment of the display in their entrance. The boat would represent the involvement Waipu's Nova Scotian settlers had with the sea and show visitors the type of craft they used when they first established themselves in the region.

This deaccession was mutually beneficial and a number of positive things came out of this process. The New Zealand National Maritime Museum gained a little more space in storage, but more importantly established a new relationship with another museum. I assisted them in finding a shipwright to inspect the boat and determine for them whether it was a worthwhile and feasible project. The shipwright, Colin Brown stored the vessel for Waipu Museum while they raised funds for the building project and eventually restored it for them.

For Waipu Museum, the boat is part of their long-term plan to present their story in an evocative way. The boat represents the type of vessel that many Nova Scotians would have used in their daily lives in the Waipu area. The boat has since been used on a film set, in return Waipu Museum was able to negotiate a proper cradle be built for it so that it can be stored and displayed properly. The boat will go on display once the Museum can raise additional funding for their redevelopment project.

Deaccessioning, although it can be a daunting and long process, can bring positive rewards. Sometimes you just have to bite the bullet and do it!

Vicky Spalding is the Registrar at the New Zealand National Maritime Museum and an active member of the Upper North Island Registrars Group. She also belongs to the Australian Registrars Group

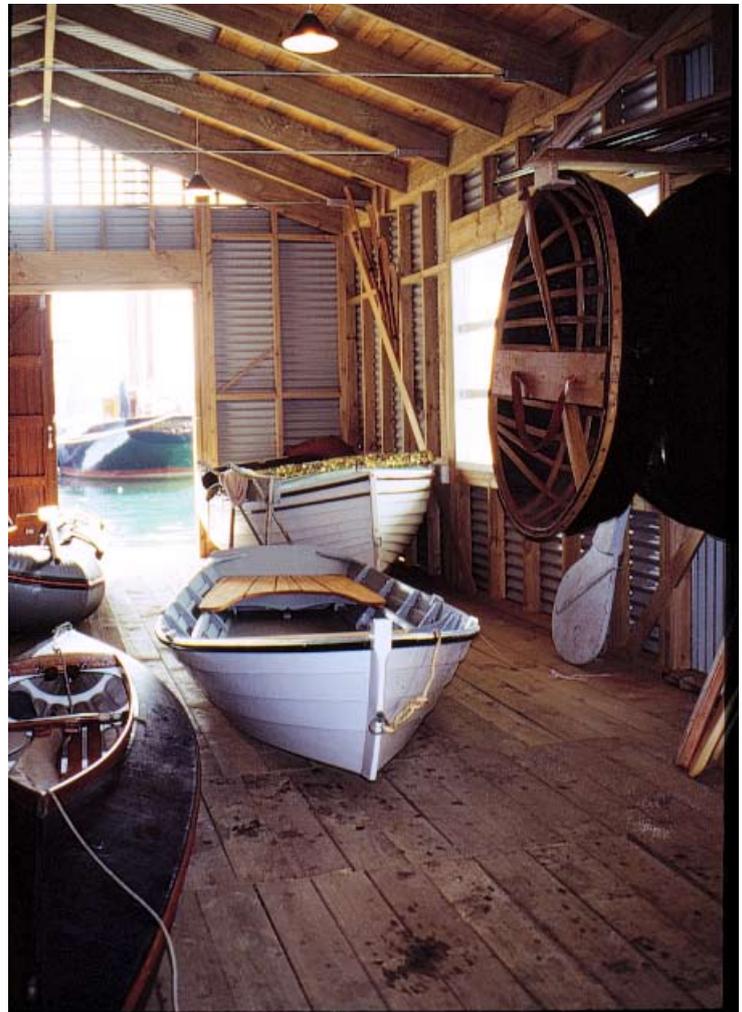


Figure 1: The old floating boat shed at the New Zealand National Maritime Museum, previously home to some of the boats referred to in this article. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: PAUL GILBERT, NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM.

This article is from a presentation on deaccessioning delivered to the Upper North Island Registrars group in November 2008 at the Whangarei Museum.

The Upper North Island Registrars network meets 3 times a year and each meeting includes a topic for discussion that members can volunteer to present on. Pip Harrison and Katherine Bol are the co-ordinators for the group.

REFERENCES

Spalding, V (2005). Wanted: a good home for these vessels... *Te Ara: Journal of Museums Aotearoa*, 30 (1) pp 34-35.