



February 15, 2020

To Friends of HSP:

Stephan Salisbury's article about the Historical Society of Pennsylvania posted to the *Inquirer* online this morning is misleading and biased, suggesting a practice that is normal at libraries and museums is nefarious when done by HSP. As part of standard collection management best practices, HSP has deaccessioned (removed from its collections) the Baker Collection's medals because these three-dimensional objects no longer fall within the society's principal mission. The collection was brought to auction only after HSP made offers to place them at other institutions. Proceeds from the sale of these items will be used in accordance with the policies of the American Library Association's Rare Book and Manuscript Division to support HSP's research library and manuscript collections which consist of more than 21 million manuscripts, books, and graphic images, one of the largest and most distinguished American history collections in the world.

Twenty-five years ago, HSP members voted to change the society's mission, and to function thenceforth as a research library. At this time, HSP arranged to donate to the Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent the collections of three-dimensional artifacts without cost over a ten-year period. In 2009, at PHM's request, HSP's members approved an earlier transfer of title to the objects transferred thus far. This transfer constituted a deaccession. The Baker Collection medals, Freedom Box, and West portrait of William Hamilton remained at HSP. Following a thorough collection survey in 2016, I recommended that the board vote to deaccession these remaining artifacts in keeping with HSP's now two-decade-old revised mission so as to support the collections, present and future.

Note that HSP deaccessioned only the three-dimensional components (principally commemorative medals) in the Baker Collection, retaining possession of all documents and other two-dimensional materials for the continued use of researchers. I would also note that only one researcher in twenty-five years of institutional memory has asked to view the medals.

In recent years, HSP has added upwards of 200 new collections annually. Few arrive with funding for their support, yet we accept them in the interest of preserving historic documents and strengthening the importance of our collections to researchers. Each new collection requires processing, which is an expensive and time-intensive undertaking. Many collections may require extensive and expensive conservation treatment. All must be preserved within a secure and environmentally proper space (12 miles of shelf space now and growing). As anyone familiar with collections management in libraries and museums would know, it is standard operating procedure to regularly cull duplicates or objects that are no longer relevant to an institution's collecting mandate.

Mr. Salisbury suggests that our cash needs have led us to “sell off parts” of our collection. He makes no distinction between our core collection and items that are holdovers from the days when we maintained an artifact collection. We have sold none of our core collection over the last decade, and we have no plans to do so now. The real story here is HSP’s successful transition from a multi-purpose, multi-collection type society into one of the finest research libraries and manuscript collections in the nation. With a strategic plan that has led to increased inter-institutional collaboration and some of the best public programming and educational opportunities for students and adults in the Philadelphia region, an article accusing us of improperly selling items is harmful to the public interest.

Respectfully submitted,

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