What does LancasterHistory collect?

LancasterHistory collects a wide variety of materials that represent the history of Lancaster County, the life and legacies of President James Buchanan, Thaddeus Stevens, and Lydia Hamilton Smith, and the decorative arts traditions of Lancaster County, including:

- Historical objects
- Manuscripts
- Photographs
- Books
- Art
- Maps
- Ephemera
- Oral history
- Audio/visual recordings
- Born-digital images, recordings, manuscripts, etc.

How do I donate an item?

Let us know what you would like to donate by either filling out the Potential Object Donation Form online or filling out this PDF form [PDF, 241kb]. Please provide as much information as possible and attach any supporting documentation.

Completed paper forms can be mailed back to LancasterHistory at:

LancasterHistory  
Attn: Collections  
230 N. President Avenue  
Lancaster, PA 17603

Can I send or bring my item to LancasterHistory immediately?

Unfortunately, we are not able to accept unsolicited donations at this time.

If you would like to donate something, please fill out the Potential Object Donation Form. A staff member who specializes in the appropriate collecting area will follow up with you to request clear, high-resolution images and/or to meet virtually via video conferencing (Zoom, FaceTime, etc.) if LancasterHistory is interested in learning more about the item(s).
A staff member will make arrangements with the donor and follow all applicable Health & Safety guidelines to protect all parties involved.

How is the decision made to accept or decline an item?

LancasterHistory considers many factors when reviewing a donation, including, but not limited to, the item’s historical or cultural significance for Lancaster County; physical condition; whether or not LancasterHistory already owns a similar item or copy; the ability of LancasterHistory to store and care for an item; and the item’s ownership and use history. Potential additions to the collection go through a rigorous review process and are subject to a vote by LancasterHistory’s Collections Committee.

If my item is accepted, how can I get my donation to LancasterHistory?
Donations should be shipped via USPS or another carrier, if possible, upon instruction from LancasterHistory staff. If a donation must be delivered in person or retrieved by LancasterHistory, a staff member will make arrangements with the donor and follow all applicable Health & Safety guidelines to protect the parties involved.

Are donated items accessible to the public?
Yes. Donated items are accessible to the public for research and through exhibitions. Items in LancasterHistory’s collections that are not on exhibit are available for research on-site during regular hours and online on our website. All artifacts are preserved in secure, climate-controlled storage areas.

Preserving, digitizing, storing, and making these artifacts accessible to the public is expensive. The staff will be happy to discuss the cost of processing your artifacts and we encourage you to consider a monetary gift with your donation so we can complete this work promptly.

Can I get a tax deduction for my donation?
Donations to LancasterHistory are generally tax deductible. Consult with a tax specialist to determine your eligibility.

The staff of LancasterHistory cannot provide a monetary appraisal of your gift, but we may be able to suggest professional appraisers. In most cases, an appraisal of the donated item will be necessary to receive a tax deduction.
Can an item I donated or was donated by my ancestor be returned to me?
Items that have been formally accessioned into the collections cannot be returned to the donor or their descendants. At the end of the donation process, donors are asked to sign a Deed of Gift that legally transfers ownership of the materials, as well as all associated rights and interests, to LancasterHistory.

Are donated items ever deaccessioned?
Yes. Donated items may be deaccessioned (permanently removed from the museum’s collections) for several reasons, including duplicate items, materials that have deteriorated beyond repair or beyond reasonable cost of repair, or materials that are considered injurious to health and safety.

Does LancasterHistory accept loans of objects?
LancasterHistory only accepts loans for specific short-term exhibit purposes. We do not accept long-term loans.