



DREXEL UNIVERSITY

Atwater Kent Collection

Evaluation Report

January 2025

Since 2019 the Drexel University Atwater Kent Collection staff have been working diligently under the leadership of Page Talbott with Stacey Swigart to review and document the breadth and depth of the former collection of the Atwater Kent Museum (aka Philadelphia History Museum).

The initial undertaking began with several steps in a long-range plan.

The **first** was to develop a series of Evaluation Categories that were comprehensive yet broad enough to cover the wide range of themes and subjects of the collection. [see <https://philadelphiahistory.org/collections-faqs/>]

Second was to create a “rating system” of 1-4:

1 – Iconic/Intrinsic – Objects that are critically important and necessary to tell the many stories of Philadelphia's history.

2 – Objects that are meaningful in interpreting Philadelphia History and serve to elaborate main themes in the city’s history.

3 – Objects that may/may not have interpretive value. There are questions about whether these items should remain in the Collection and could use further research.

4 – Does not relate to Philadelphia, duplicative, condition issues, poor interpretive value. Should likely not remain in the Collection.

Focusing initially on the Three-Dimensional collection, each object in the database was assigned an evaluation category, and when complete, a series of evaluation category spreadsheets was created that staff used to assign an evaluation rating of 1-4 as outlined above.

Third, staff began a physical inventory and assessment of the objects in the Collection, taking photographs, documenting the objects for measurements, and updating metadata in the electronic collections records.

Fourth, a review of ALL paper documentation was conducted to see what information could be gathered about each object/collection and how it could help determine the level the item ranked on the rating system. This included,

- Review of all gift agreements and restrictions.
- Identification of each artifact's historic value or story.
- Identification of the artifacts that lack Philadelphia historical significance and/or provenance.
- Identification of artifacts that are in poor condition or duplicative.
- Identification of gaps in the Collection and the types of objects and artifacts that should be added to the Collection to tell Philadelphia's complete history.

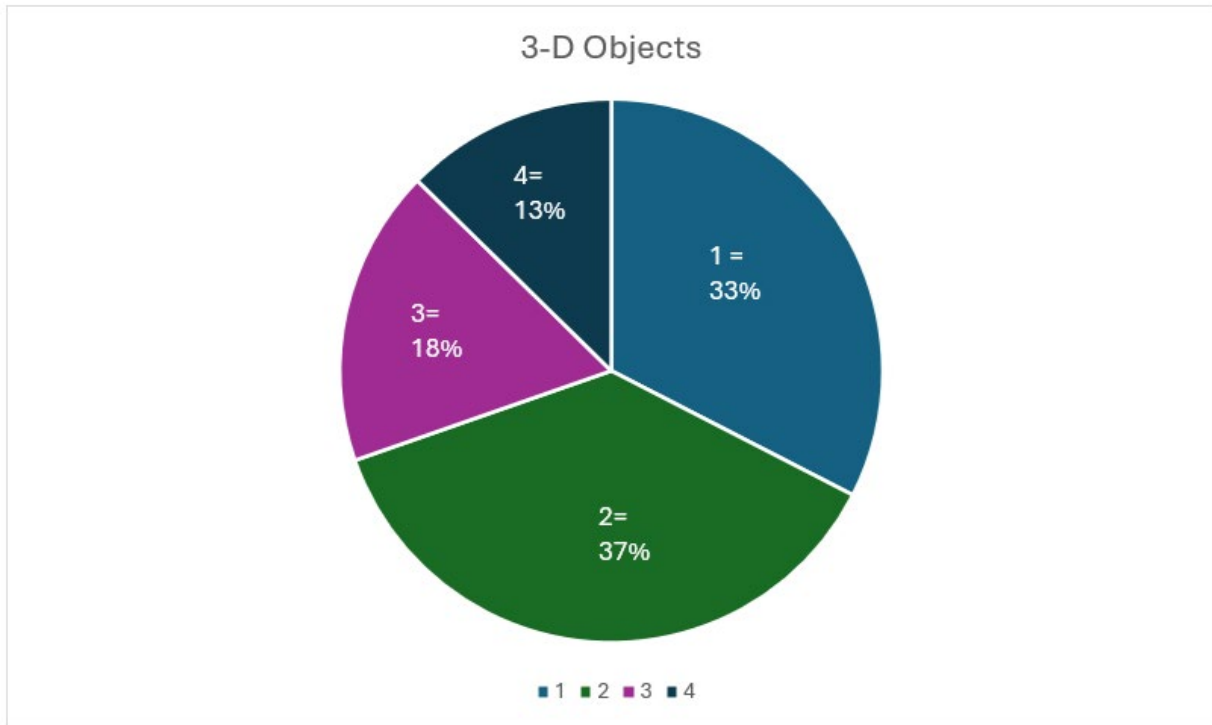
Fifth, staff took the data from the spreadsheets and transferred the evaluation information and rating number to the database (PastPerfect). This also became an additional second look at the information about the object that may/may not have resulted in a rating change or even a change in category due to the updated data. This information has been used to update the records on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, as they are updated and photography is completed, records are added to the AKC Online Collection--public portal for visitors and researchers to access information on the AKC website (Philadelphiahistory.org)-- making the Collection virtually accessible for the first time ever.

A third review is taking place as items are tagged with searchable subjects and search terms for adding into the portal. As needed, definitions for places, subjects, companies and businesses are added as time allows during ongoing data cleanup, thus making it easier for people interacting and researching available online records with additional clarification and general information.

The evaluation of the Three-Dimensional and Two-Dimensional collection has been completed at the spreadsheet level. Currently the staff is working on continuing documentation of the objects and updating the digital records with the updated evaluation information. This work is a significant, time-consuming, and ongoing project.

For the time being, the AKC has no plans to deaccession items with little/no connection to Philadelphia, as that is a complicated and resource-consuming process. For now, the top priorities for staff time include inaugurating a robust loan program and serving other institutions' needs for small exhibits featuring AKC items.

Three-Dimensional Object Ratings



Three-dimensional objects were broken down into 44 categories [A chart of categories can be found on the website www.philadelphiahistory.org under “Collection FAQs”]. During the data update process of transferring information from database to spreadsheet and back to database with updates, some items were moved to more appropriate categories based on review(s) of content of what the object best fit. The numbers represented in the pie charts for objects date from 2018 – 2022.

Ratings:

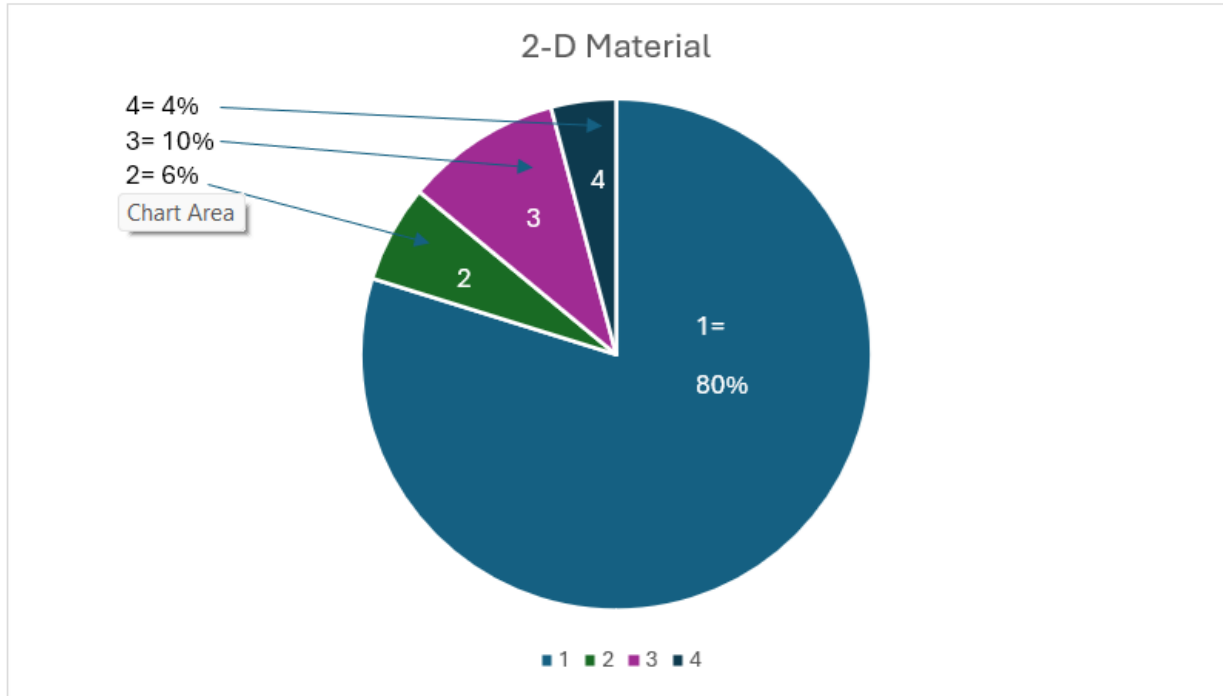
1: 11,462

2: 13,064

3: 6,225

4: 4,458

Two-Dimensional Archival Ratings



Two-dimensional items were broken down into 194 categories based on the item name (aka Object Name). Items with similar names were added together (e.g. anything with “advertisement” or “ad” in the name was reviewed in the same category under “Advertisement”). [A chart of categories can be found on the website www.philadelphiahistory.org under “Collection FAQs”] The numbers represented in the pie charts for archival items date from 2020 – 2024.

Ratings:

1: 38,004

2: 2,944

3: 4,716

4: 1,957

Photographs

The approximate 50,000 photographs in the Collection have not been included in the evaluation, as they are already well documented, are primarily recording Philadelphia buildings and landscapes, and have written finding aids.

Library / Books

The handful of books in the Collection (currently fewer than 650) were primarily published in Philadelphia. Therefore, they were not evaluated as it was assumed they would remain in the AKC.

Note that at the beginning of the Evaluation process former museum staff had all of the Library/Books materials in the Archives section of the database. Drexel staff have been moving published books into the “Library” catalog of the database as appropriate to better represent their published information. This is an ongoing project with fixes happening as reviews are ongoing for portal updates.

“Found in Collection”

Part of this evaluation project process has involved dealing with thousands of “FIC” items – these are items that were listed in the system as “Found in Collection.” For the first forty years of the Museum (through 1977), only sporadic inventorying was completed. As a result, in our evaluation and inventory process, we have discovered that there are duplicate records. Something that may have been entered by an early Accession Number may also have a “Found in Collection” number and was re-added to the inventory at some point since it had never been officially numbered in the past. One of the two items is typically listed as “missing” as a result. We are matching these items up based on their descriptions and/or markings. When the match is made, the FIC number is deleted from the database, and the original Accession Number/Object ID is utilized for more accurate record keeping.

In Summary

The process of fully inventorying the Collection will likely take years; as historical errors need to be corrected, further research will be needed, and new information will inevitably be forthcoming. Yet the work done so far has been extremely substantial; the AKC has never been better documented or accessible.