

Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society  
**Code of Ethics**

The Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society (“SCVHS” or “the Society”) is a charitable organization acting in the public trust, engaged in the practice of public history and holding collections and information as a benefit to the local community and to the American public. SCVHS recognizes that it is not enough merely to follow all local, state and federal laws. Its directors, employees, and volunteers are expected to abide by the ethical and performance standards that apply to professional organizations engaged in the practice of public history and to take affirmative steps to maintain their integrity and engender public confidence.

SCVHS performs a variety of interrelated functions including the operation and management of museum facilities. Specifically:

The purpose of the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society is to stimulate public interest in the history of the Santa Clarita Valley and environs, to collect and preserve facts and artifacts pertinent to the area, to advocate for historic preservation throughout the region, and to inform the public.

This Code of Ethics is modeled after guidelines established by the American Alliance of Museums and the American Association for State and Local History. The guidelines have been adapted to fit the Society’s unique circumstance.

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## I. Governance

The governing authority of SCVHS is its Board of Directors (the “Board”). The Board serves in the public interest and is accountable to the organization and to the public. It is responsible for making and maintaining policies, professional standards, and operational continuity. It protects and enhances its collections and its physical, human and financial resources, and it ensures that all of these resources support the organization’s mission and respond to the pluralism and diversity of the public at large. Board members must be loyal to the purpose of SCVHS and must understand and respect its policies and core documents.

Thus, the Board ensures the following:

That all persons who work for or on behalf of SCVHS, whether paid or volunteer, understand and support its mission and public trust responsibilities;

That its directors understand and fulfill their trusteeship and act corporately, not as individuals;

That the organization’s collections and programs and its physical, human and financial resources are protected, maintained and developed in support of the organization’s mission;

That it is responsive to and represents the interests of the public;

That it maintains the relationship with staff in which shared roles are recognized and separate responsibilities respected;

That working relationships among board members, employees and volunteers are based on equity and mutual respect;

That professional standards and practices inform and guide the organization’s operations;

That policies are articulated, and prudent oversight is practiced; and

That governance promotes the public good rather than individual financial gain.

The SCVHS President is empowered to act on behalf of the Society on a day-to-day basis, subject to restrictions set forth in the SCVHS Bylaws.

Board members must be aware of applicable provisions of California nonprofit law, tax and accounting regulations, and personal and institutional liability and exposure.

Board members and other key personnel involved with the restoration and rehabilitation of historic buildings are expected to have basic familiarity with the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties and the California Historic Building Code. (Both can be found on the Society's SCVHS.org website.)

When SCVHS employs direct staff, each member of the Board of Directors is every bit as much an "employer" as every other Board member and must be aware of basic California labor laws, including but not limited to the areas of nondiscrimination, overtime and breaks, paid leave, health insurance, and the use of direct employees vs. 1099 contractors.

In keeping with their fiduciary responsibility to safeguard the Society, the Board of Directors should engage the services of competent counsel when circumstances call for it, including the negotiation and/or approval of contracts.

The Board of Directors should reflect the communities served by the Society and address the needs of those communities through relevant, meaningful, and equitable programming and exhibits.

New candidates for the Board should be considered on the basis of a diversity of qualifications such as community leadership, business or management background, connections to underrepresented populations within the community, and other needed skills and abilities. The degree of current participation in SCVHS, such as accumulated volunteer hours, should not be a criterium for Board service.

The Board should broaden the Society's representation and reach within the community by engaging a variety of local leaders in advisory and ambassador capacities.

## **II. Human Resources**

Responsibility for the operation of the Society rests with its Board and staff, whether paid or volunteer.

All individuals in the service of public history – Board members, employees, volunteers, interns and contract personnel – deserve the respect and support of their peers, superiors, and institutions. SCVHS respects the privacy of its team members and acts in their best interests.

Individuals employed in the practice of public history deserve compensation commensurate with their training, performance, and contribution to the institution. While SCVHS was not always financially capable of paying market rates in the past, future Board discussions of staff compensation should focus on “how to” instead of “why we can’t.”

Volunteers should be held to clearly articulated performance objectives and offered the same respect as their paid colleagues.

SCVHS strives to engage personnel, including volunteers, who have appropriate training and expertise and provides them with opportunities for additional training in furtherance of their responsibilities to the Society. SCVHS recognizes the importance of lifelong learning, inasmuch as professional standards and “best practices” in the museum field are continually evolving.

When SCVHS employs a museum administrator, that person alone is responsible for the employment, discipline, and release of all other museum staff, subject to established personnel policies. The museum administrator is accountable to the SCVHS President or designee on a day-to-day basis and is expected to remain in close communication with that person. The museum administrator is accountable to the Board of Directors during scheduled Board meetings.

In the absence of a museum administrator, museum staff, including museum contract personnel, are accountable to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors; however, only one individual director, designated by the SCVHS President or Executive Committee, can be the direct supervisor of museum staff. Other Board members should take care to avoid giving contradictory, confusing, or conflicting instructions directly to staff and are encouraged to communicate their desires through the designated supervisor.

SCVHS staff and contract personnel who are not “museum staff,” i.e., who are not engaged in the operations or maintenance of one or more museum facilities, are accountable to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors, or to a supervisor designated by the SCVHS President or Executive Committee.

SCVHS staff are hired because of their special knowledge or ability in some aspect of the Society's activities. Board members and other personnel should respect the professional expertise of its staff, and decisions involving professional matters should incorporate the opinions and judgments of the professional staff. Responsibility for final decisions rests with the Board of Directors, and all staff members are expected to support these decisions. However, no staff member can be required to reverse or suppress their professional judgment in order to conform to a Board decision. All SCVHS personnel should feel comfortable engaging in intellectual debate without fear of retaliation.

SCVHS personnel are never wholly separable from the institution; actions by an employee or volunteer may reflect upon the organization or be attributed to it.

SCVHS does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, color, national origin or ancestry, physical or mental disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, sex (including breastfeeding), sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, pregnancy, age, or military/veteran status.

Board members, staff, and volunteers shall not engage in or condone any type of harassment or discrimination. Instead, all SCVHS personnel are expected to observe confidentiality and treat colleagues with respect, fairness, courtesy, and good faith. Personnel should be made to feel safe and comfortable reporting grievances to their supervisor, to the SCVHS President, and to the Executive Committee.

### **III. Trust; Conflict of Interest**

No individual may use their position in the Society for personal gain or to benefit another at the expense of the Society, its mission, its reputation, or the public. All proprietary information should remain confidential.

Collections-related activities shall promote the public good rather than individual financial gain. Personnel shall refrain from personal collecting when it conflicts with the collecting interests of the Society. Personnel shall not compete with SCVHS in any personal collecting activity or use their affiliation with SCVHS to advance their personal collecting activities. In disposing of personal collections of interest to the Society, SCVHS personnel are expected to give "first right of refusal" to the Society.

SCVHS encourages collaborations and partnerships with like-minded institutions, local government agencies and other community organizations; and certain types of

outside employment, such as teaching, writing, and consulting can benefit SCVHS and the staff member by stimulating goodwill and professional development. Thus, a Board or staff member's concurrent involvement and/or employment by another institution in the history field, or elsewhere, does not generally constitute a conflict of interest; however, such relationships should be disclosed to the Board. At all times, an individual's outside employment must not diminish or compromise their responsibility to SCVHS or be a detriment to SCVHS in any way. Loyalty to the Society's mission and to the public the organization serves is the essence of work in SCVHS, whether volunteer or paid.

In general, SCVHS personnel are authorized to share digital images of objects in the collection on not-for-profit websites, including social media sites.

SCVHS personnel are expected to forward media requests to authorized personnel. Only the SCVHS President, and persons authorized by the President to act on his or her behalf, speaks for the Society.

SCVHS collections, property, grounds, and other assets are not to be used for partisan political activity.

In furtherance of the Society's role as an advocate for historic preservation, it is appropriate for Board officers to issue policy statements; comment on various types of development documents and processes; and support (or oppose) legislation and other government action involving historic buildings and landscapes.

No person may use the SCVHS name or logo without approval.

The document titled "[Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society Conflict of Interest Policy](#)" is incorporated herein and made a part hereof.

#### **IV. Collections**

SCVHS holds varied and voluminous material collections in trust for the benefit of the public. These historical resources, which can be as small as a "born digital" computer file and as large as a historic building, and which span time from before the arrival of humans to "five minutes ago," are the springboards upon which the story of the Santa Clarita Valley is told and the bedrock upon which the practice of public history rests. The Society's Collections Management Policy is a separate Board-approved document that guides SCVHS in the acquisition, care, and disposal of objects.

In fulfillment of their public trust, SCVHS personnel must be responsible stewards, giving priority to the protection and management of the historical resources within their care and preserving the physical and intellectual integrity of these resources.

SCVHS personnel manage the Society's historical resources in accord with the Collections Management Policy officially adopted by the Board of Directors. These policies should be reviewed regularly.

SCVHS personnel allow and regulate public access to the SCVHS collections and related information, in accord with the Collections Management Policy. Information that is legally or customarily restricted, such as documentation of Native American cultural/archaeological sites, is not accessible to the public.

Historical resources should not be treated as assets to be collateralized or sold for financial reasons.

When each historical photographic image is counted separately, SCVHS has more than 1 million objects in its collection. Digitizing the collection and displaying items on the Internet will always run many years behind. SCVHS personnel must never promise any donor of any historical material that their gift will be placed on public display, whether on- or off-line.

The acceptance of large, delicate, or unusual collections should be accompanied by a financial bequest from, or arranged by, the donor to cover the costs, including staff costs, of their processing, preservation, and long-term care.

The objects in the Society's collection, their documentation, and all additional documentation developed subsequent to their acquisition, are the property of SCVHS. Except in the case of temporary museum exhibits, SCVHS does not accept loans of historical materials or artifacts. "Loan" in this context does not mean the temporary borrowing of photographs and similar materials from the public for the purpose of digital preservation – what SCVHS personnel call "scan and return."

With Board approval, SCVHS may place items from its collection on temporary loan to local government agencies, not-for-profit agency facilities, and accredited museums when such placement advances the Society's ability to inform the public and stimulate public interest in the history of the Santa Clarita Valley and environs. When photographic images are included in the loan, digital image files or duplicate copies should be provided to the borrower. Original photographic prints, negatives and transparencies should never leave the Society premises\* except in rare instances

where the nature of the photographic item itself makes it historic, such as a rare artistic print, and then only with Board approval. *\*In this instance, “the Society premises” include any facility or portion thereof that is actively used by SCVHS for storage or digital preservation, whether managed by SCVHS or by a local government agency.*

Stable artifacts that are not original photographic materials may be used off-site by authorized SCVHS personnel for demonstrative purposes. Examples might include a piece of the St. Francis Dam that is interpreted during an off-site lecture or school presentation or in-studio television taping; or an SCVHS-owned historic vehicle in a parade.

SCVHS partners with the City of Santa Clarita Public Library in the professional care of certain collection items.

SCVHS follows the deaccessioning process described in the Collections Management Policy and in the document, “Deaccession Policies and Procedures,” which is incorporated into the Collections Management Policy. Decisions to deaccession are based upon the relationship of the object to the institution’s mission, the object’s cultural value (i.e., its ability to interpret a larger story), the physical condition of the object, and/or the ability of SCVHS to provide proper care for the object. Under no circumstances is the decision to deaccession an object made on the basis of its monetary value.

Funds from the sale of objects identified for disposal may be used only for the acquisition of new objects for the collection or for the direct care or preservation of existing objects in the collection. Funds are not to be used to provide financial support for institutional operations. In the case disposal of buildings or landscapes, funds acquired through such disposal can be used for direct care and preservation of objects, archives, buildings, archaeological sites, and cultural landscapes that provide public benefit as described in the Society’s Collections Management Policy.

Donors of items approved for deaccessioning have no more legal claim to the items than any other person, and often less so if the donor took a tax deduction for the value of the item at the time of the donation. Items approved for deaccessioning should not be offered back to the original donor, to avoid creating an instance of tax fraud and jeopardizing the Society’s nonprofit status.

Historical resources are acquired, cared for, and interpreted with sensitivity to their cultural origins. All efforts are made to be transparent about and representative of

these origins. Human remains, Native American funerary objects, sacred objects, and potentially Nazi-looted cultural materials are handled in the manner(s) set forth in the “Deaccession Policies and Procedures” document.

The physical condition of historical resources, including a record of their past treatment, is to be maintained and appropriate steps taken to mitigate potential hazards to people and property.

## **V. Interpretation**

Successful museums are not static, monolithic, or boring. They are dynamic; they reflect their communities’ changing populations and values; and they create engaging spaces that inform, inspire, and challenge preconceptions. The idea of the public museum is not that old. It emerged out of the European revolutions of 1848 – about the time California became a state. Initially, public museums in Europe were open only to the aristocracy. Change has been rapid and consistent. California has a difficult history that must be told honestly. Los Angeles County voted against Abraham Lincoln both times. A century and a half later, Los Angeles County favored Barack Obama both times. The Santa Clarita Valley of today is not the Santa Clarita Valley of 1850 or 1950. A successful museum is both a mirror of its community and a leader in the placement of historic events within a modern context that connects them to the audience.

The days of Anglo actors portraying Native Americans, ethnic Chinese and African Americans on stage and screen (e.g., Warner Oland as Charlie Chan; 1920s Newhall resident Charley Mack in blackface) are long gone for seemingly obvious reasons. Similarly, the museum community in the United States and Canada is coming to terms with its historical complicity in the marginalization of indigenous and other minority communities when museum emissaries collected and/or unearthed their remains and funerary items and squirreled them away in museum vaults for academic study. Lettered historians, archaeologists and anthropologists can and do present pertinent facts, but no longer are they considered the sole experts or final arbiters of truths embodied in diverse cultures’ material and sacred objects. Successful interpretation tends to spring from a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach with experts from diverse backgrounds and worldviews participating in the development of the story. Without the inclusion of descendants and/or representatives of the culture that utilized what is now considered an artifact, or which was extraordinarily impacted by a historical event, the story is often incomplete.

Historical interpretation comes in many forms, such as guided on-site museum tours, exhibits, historic markers, lectures, books and magazine articles, documentary videos, and websites. Successful interpretation is based upon sound scholarship, thorough research, and pluralistic approaches that incorporate and respect community-based knowledge, multicultural traditions, and the potential for multiple perspectives. SCVHS makes every effort to receive guidance from appropriate subject-matter experts regardless of topic; especially so, when interpreting facts or artifacts relating to historically marginalized and/or subjugated cultural groups.

Successful interpretation results in meaningful experiences for the audience when it goes beyond simple names and dates and shows how the subject matter impacted different people's lives in different ways. Successful interpretation often challenges conventional wisdom when it presents information and viewpoints that deviate from narrow, incomplete, biased and/or erroneous interpretations from the past. Successful interpretation doesn't hide or gloss over actions and events that might be considered shameful today; instead, it places them into context and tells "the other side(s) of the story."

## **VI. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access**

Everyone has a story worth telling. Everyone makes history. Through staffing, training, collecting, programming, and marketing, SCVHS strives to preserve and share the rich histories of the entire community it serves. SCVHS personnel must be aware of and responsive to the diverse cultures within its community and must avoid bias in documentation, collections, preservation, and interpretation.

Access to historical resources gives preservation activities their meaning. Providing and promoting equitable access to historical resources through exhibitions, tours, educational programs, publications, electronic media, and research is critical in fulfilling the public trust and mission of SCVHS. Access and limitations to access are governed by institutional policies and by applicable rights of privacy, ownership, cultural standards, and intellectual freedom.

The buildings on the Society's campus in William S. Hart Park were moved there because of their historical character and integrity. Each is a "qualified historical building or structure" under Section 18955 of the California Health and Safety Code by virtue of its listing in the City of Santa Clarita's inventory of historic sites, and in some instances the State Register. SCVHS conforms to the California State Historical Building Code (Health and Safety Codes 18950-18962). When wheelchair access to certain buildings is not possible without compromising the historical integrity of the

building, SCVHS strives to provide equally meaningful interpretations of the experiences a visitor would encounter inside the building.

## **VII. Intellectual Freedom**

Historical scholarship and interpretation depend upon free and open exploration and interpretation of the human experience. SCVHS respects all legal, ethical, and cultural standards regarding individual privacy, human-based research and access to and use of sensitive cultural materials.

## **VIII. Revenue Producing Activities**

Activities that involve the marketing and sale of products, programs, services, and facilities are acceptable ways to produce revenue and increase public awareness of, and participation in, the Society's activities.

No revenue producing activities should violate or compromise the integrity of the Society's mission. These activities should not hamper the ability of SCVHS or its personnel to meet professional standards or endanger the Society's nonprofit status.

Control of the intellectual content of products (e.g., exhibitions, publications, collections, programs) should not be delegated to outside parties for the purpose of obtaining financial support.

SCVHS personnel involved in raising funds or soliciting monetary or in-kind contributions must do so with honesty as to the need for such contributions and must use donations only for the donor's intended purposes. Gifts should be solicited without the promise of opportunities or advantages not offered to all donors of comparable gifts in the past.