San Mateo
Public Library

Special Collections Policy
Updated 10-28-24

This policy identifies the special collections at the San Mateo Public Library and the process for evaluating proposals to create new special collections at the San Mateo Public Library. A special collection is defined as a focused set of library materials shelved apart from the general collection that fulfills a specific community need or library role.

I. Guidelines for Establishing Special Collections

Special collection proposals can be formulated by members of the community or internally by Library teams or staff members. Proposals shall be submitted to the City Librarian who will work with staff to evaluate proposals based on the feasibility criteria listed below. Staff will submit their evaluation and recommendation to the City Librarian who will make the final decision in a timely manner.

Special collection proposals must meet the following feasibility standards:

1. The proposed new collection's definition should include a statement of scope indicating circulating/reference, formats, age of audience, etc. The scope should be consistent with the Library's vision and mission.

2. The new collection shall serve a defined targeted community. Communities should be defined by a quantifiable measure. Examples include native speakers of a language, age level or other special needs. The purpose of separating this collection would be to facilitate access and use by this defined community as well as by the general community.

3. Increase in usage should be a goal in creating the new collection from the existing collection. For example, separating this collection from the general collection would increase its visibility with the aim of increasing usage.

4. New collection proposals should consider the necessary operational funding support needed to develop and maintain the collection. The proposal should include a funding strategy for how the new collection will be supported financially from its start-up to ongoing maintenance (e.g. keeping the collection current with new titles, renewing subscriptions). This funding strategy may include donor pledges, funding partnerships, and grant opportunities. There should not be an expectation that the future development and maintenance of the new collection will be absorbed in the Library's materials budget.

5. The new collection should be developed by the existing expertise of selectors on the staff who are capable of developing and maintaining this collection. If special expertise is required, the necessary support should be in place to provide training to staff or to hire new staff with the desired expertise. Community volunteers can be utilized in an advisory capacity; but they cannot be expected to assume selection responsibilities in place of staff.

6. The Library must have the necessary space and furniture to house and display the new collection. If special furniture will be required or space created, the necessary funding should also be secured.

7. If a special collection contains donated materials, the materials become property of the library.

8. There should not be an expectation that special collections will exist in perpetuity. Reasons for sunsetting a special collection may include space constraints, lack of sufficient budget, change in community demand, or other factors. If deemed necessary, items that were once part of a special collection may be absorbed into the general circulating collection.

II. Special Collections

The Library's current special collections are listed below:

Leon S. Benson Holocaust Studies Collection

Established in 2000 with a grant from the family of Leon S. Benson, this circulating collection provides materials in a variety of formats including a broad array of educational materials that depict both written and visual accounts of those who witnessed the events of the Holocaust. The collection focuses on personal narratives, biographies and general works describing the events and conditions of the Holocaust.

California Collection

The collection includes works of fiction and nonfiction on the history of California and its localities, with an emphasis on San Mateo and the San Francisco Bay Area. Many of these materials are rare and valuable.

Biotechnology Learning Center

Established in 2006 as part of the Genentech Foundation Biotechnology Learning Center, the biotechnology collection offers reference and circulating titles in the fields of biotechnology and life sciences; and is a resource for biotechnology education. The collection includes print and electronic resources that are current and comprehensive.

Franklin Templeton Investments Business Resource Center

The San Mateo Public Library has the largest public library collection of business materials on the Peninsula. The Franklin Templeton Business Resource Center offers information and research services for small business owners, job seekers & individual investors.

The San Mateo Public Library is part of Candid's Funding Information Network, a resource of information for nonprofits. Funding Information Network locations provide local nonprofits with tools they can use to become successful grantseekers.

San Mateo County Genealogical Society Collection

The San Mateo County Genealogical Society supports the study of family history on the San Francisco Peninsula and beyond through its collections, educational programs, and research services.

III. Displays, Photographs & Paintings

The Library also possesses several archival collections that are on display, in storage, or housed at other institutions as listed below.

Birds of America, from original drawings by John James Audubon (1860)

The Audubon book was donated to the San Mateo Public Library by the Parrott family of San Mateo in 1941. The book is to be kept on the Library's premises in a secure locked glass display case. The current glass case was donated by David D. Bohannon to enhance the display of the book for public viewing.

The book is on display on the Mezzanine Level of the Main Library under security camera surveillance and away from direct sunlight to preserve the hand painted coloring on the plates. The book is to be insured at all times by the City of San Mateo.

101st Airborne Memorial Collection and Display

In 1974, the City of San Mateo designated the Library to house and exhibit the 101st Airborne Memorial Display to commemorate the special relationship between the City of San Mateo and the veterans of Company A, 1/327th Battalion of the 101st Airborne ("The Screaming Eagles") during the Vietnam War.

The Display is located in the northeast corner of the 3rd floor of the Main Library and includes memorabilia such as artifacts, photos, and a video presentation featuring the welcome home parade hosted by the City of San Mateo for the 101st Airborne Vietnam Veterans on January 23, 1972. Historical digital images are accessible at the Online Archive of California.

Robert Loomis Historical Paintings and Line Drawings of the City of San Mateo

In 1981, the Library Board of Trustees acquired a group of oil paintings and line drawings of scenes in San Mateo by local artist Robert Loomis. The Board honors the following verbal and written assurances made to the donors:

a. that the paintings and drawings would remain at the Library in perpetuity for future residents to see this historical asset
b. that the paintings be on exhibit in the Library or City Hall so that the public may view the collection
c. that the oil paintings may be borrowed, either in part or in whole, by the donors, and by any other persons or organizations who the Board may designate, for no longer than two months. A written request for permission to exhibit the paintings must be made to the Board of Trustees, detailing the borrower's date of exhibit request, insurance coverage, on-site security precautions, guarantee of safe transportation to and from the exhibit site, and that the paintings are on loan from the San Mateo Public Library.

All reproduction rights are held by the Board of Trustees and requests for permission to make reproductions should be made in writing and addressed to the Board. The Loomis collection of paintings and drawings are not to be circulated for regular Library patron use.