

FACT SHEET 1

Writing Object Stories: Some Practical Tips, or a Starting Point

Objects are focus for recovering often hidden aspects of family and community history. They can help us tap into forgotten parts of every day life and family history.

Use these prompt questions to explore the stories and associations of objects, and to write about their meaning and significance. Not all these questions will be relevant to your object. You may only know the answers a few of these questions, but the object story may still be important.

Remember these questions are just a guide, not the limits of what might be covered in an object story.

- Who used the object? If possible, ask family members for their recollections, or, if it is a museum object, ask the donor for their memories.
- What was the owner like? How is it connected with the owner?
- Why is it important to your family or museum? How is it valued? What meaning does it have for you? What feelings or ideas are evoked by the object?
- How or why has the object been kept? How has it been passed to other owners?
- Where was it used? What space, room, building or locality was it used in?
- What was the function or purpose of the object, or what work did it do?
- Why was it needed? Why was it useful or important?
- What impact did the object have on work processes, the environment, and the economy?
- How was the object used?
- What steps are involved in using the object?
- What other tools, objects or equipment was it used with?
- What skills were needed to use the object?
- If the actual owner is not known, who generally used or owned such objects?
- How long was it in use? When did it stop being used and why?
- What is important or distinctive about the design of the object? How has it changed or stayed the same?
- Where does this design fit within a class or group of similar items?
- Does the object relate to an important theme or aspect of the history of the district? If so how?
- Is there a photo of the owner? Is there a photo of the object in use, or a photo of the place where it was used?

Where possible, keep your notes with the object. If you are writing the story of a family object, remember to include a description of what the object looks like, as it is easy for the written notes to become separated from the object. Also sign and date the story so future readers will know who wrote the notes and when.