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Winterthur Press Release

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Graduate Students Champion Delaware's First Abandoned Cultural Property Legislation

New Law Gives Museums a Way to Determine the Future of Objects without Clear Ownership

Winterthur, DE, April 18, 2018—It's not often a class project results in a new state law, but graduate students in the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture (WPAMC) and the Department of History at the University of Delaware (UD) accomplished just that. Sara McNamara, Tess Frydman, and Sarah Berndt of WPAMC and Sharon Folkenroth Hess, Samuel Christensen, and Kathryn Lenart of UD wrote House Bill No. 231, Delaware's first legislation for abandoned cultural property (i.e. objects), which was signed into law in March by Governor John Carney.

Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library and the University of Delaware co-sponsor two graduate programs, with the university also offering a Museum Studies program, so students in both institutions get hands-on experience working at museums. In fall 2016, Professor Katherine Grier, Director of the Museum Studies Program at the University of Delaware, assigned service projects to teams of graduate students in her Introduction to Museums course. The Delaware Museum Association (DMA) and its president, Dan Citron, Executive Director of the New Castle Historical Society, had identified the need for a law that gave museums a method for dealing with abandoned objects in the state; Dr. Grier asked one of the teams to write a policy brief on this important issue.

Abandoned property at museums is defined as any object that has unclear title or any loan that has expired and remains unclaimed. Without legislation addressing this issue, museums have no

options for making decisions about the future of abandoned property—no way to obtain legal ownership so that a museum can conserve, lend, accession, or deaccession an object (the official process of removing an object from a museum). Delaware was one of only four states in the nation without an abandoned property law.

After consulting collections staff at Delaware museums to clearly understand their concerns related to abandoned property, the students wrote a policy brief outlining the issue and providing possible solutions based on abandoned property legislation passed by other states. Citron and the DMA threw their full support behind the students' work.

The students decided to continue with the project by bringing it to the Delaware General Assembly. Dr. Grier found a sponsor in Jeff Spiegelman, House Representative for Delaware's 11th district, who introduced the bill. It received bipartisan support and passed in both House and Senate.

When Governor Carney signed the bill, Frydman, Hess, Lenart, McNamara, and Dr. Grier were present (Christensen and Berndt were unable to attend the event, having graduated and now are working out of state). Speaking to the importance of this and similar projects, Dr. Grier noted, "The Museum Studies Program works hard to instill a service ethic among our students. Helping to advance the field is an important aspect of being a museum professional. This has been a wonderful learning experience for everyone who participated."

The students presented their work on the abandoned property legislation at the 2018 annual meeting of the Small Museum Association. As a result, the president of the Maryland Museum Association has asked for their help to write and pass similar legislation to support its museums. "My colleagues and I are so pleased to finally have an abandoned cultural property law in Delaware," said Beth Parker Miller, Winterthur's registrar. "We are grateful for the support of Dr. Grier, Dan Citron, and the Delaware Museum Association, the sponsoring legislators, and, most especially, the students, whose hard work and dedication has yielded a law with a lasting benefit for museums in our state."

Winterthur—known worldwide for its preeminent collection of American decorative arts, naturalistic gardens, and research library for the study of American art and material culture—offers a variety of tours, exhibitions, programs, and activities throughout the year. General admission includes a tour of some of the most notable spaces in the 175-room house as well as access to the Winterthur Garden and Galleries, special exhibitions, a narrated tram tour (weather permitting), the Campbell Collection of Soup Tureens, and the Enchanted Woods children’s garden. Admission costs \$20 for adults; \$18 for students and seniors; and \$6 for ages 2-11. Group rates available. For details, visit winterthur.org or call 800.448.3883.

Winterthur is open 10 a.m.–5 p.m., Tuesday–Sunday, and is located on Route 52, six miles northwest of Wilmington, Delaware, and five miles south of U.S. Route 1. Closed on Mondays, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Nestled in the heart of Delaware’s beautiful Brandywine Valley, midway between New York City and Washington, D.C., Winterthur is located minutes from Longwood Gardens and other Brandywine Valley attractions—including world-class museums, gardens, and historic sites—as well as wineries, hotels, and restaurants.

[Please click link for high-resolution image with accompanying photo credit](#)

Image caption: From the left: Daniel Citron, Executive Director of the New Castle Historical Society; Katherine C. Grier, Director of the University of Delaware Museum Studies Program; Kathryn Lenart, 2017 graduate of the Department of History Master of Arts and the Museum Studies Program; Sharon Hess, 2018 graduate of the Department of History Master of Arts and the Museum Studies Program; Tess Frydman, 2018 graduate of WPAMC and the Museum Studies Program; Sara McNamara, 2018 graduate of WPAMC and the Museum Studies Program, and Delaware Governor John Carney.

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