



## Museums for America

Sample Application MA-249375-OMS-21  
Project Category: Collections Stewardship

### **City of Boston (City Archaeology Lab)**

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$160,774
Amount of cost share:	\$184,323

The project description can be viewed in the IMLS Awarded Grants Search:  
<https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/ma-249375-oms-21>

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the current Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

## **Project Justification**

Boston will be celebrating its 400th anniversary in 2030. Historical museums and institutions across the city are preparing their 17th-century collections for public interpretation and display. The City of Boston Archaeology Program (Program) and Laboratory (Lab) curate the largest and most diverse assemblage of objects from the first decades of Boston's history. Most of these collections, however, remain uncataloged and inaccessible to the public.

The Program seeks \$184,323 in IMLS funding as part of a \$345,097 Collections Stewardship and Access project to digitize approximately 100,000 artifacts from c. 1630-1650 archaeological sites in Boston. This Boston 400 Digital Archaeology Project (Project) will make these artifacts available to the public for the first time through an online searchable database, webpages, and exhibition.

The Lab is the repository of four uncataloged archaeological collections from sites dating to the 1630s. These sites were identified as being in need of rehousing, cataloging, and digitization during a 2012 collections assessment of the collections curated at the Lab at the time of the assessment, now known as the Lab's "legacy" collections.

The four uncataloged collections included in this Project are housed in 100 1-cubic-foot boxes, averaging an estimated 1,000 artifacts per box (based on previous digitizing projects). The majority of these collections date to the early 17th century. These four collections represent 8% of the 1,250 remaining legacy collections boxes in the Lab repository in need of digitization and some of the highest research potential.

All four of these collections were excavated in the 1980s as part of the same large-scale survey in the Charlestown neighborhood of Boston. Though archaeological summary reports were published on each site's general findings (see Supporting Documents for references), the artifacts recovered were never fully catalogued, and the contents of the 100 boxes remains fundamentally unknown. The reports indicate that these collections contain significant, though not fully analyzed, historical data from the 17th century.

The four uncataloged collections to be digitized in this proposed project collections are:

- The John Winthrop Great House Site (1629-1635)**

In 1629, an advance team built Governor John Winthrop's Great House in the Charlestown neighborhood of Boston, then its own town. Winthrop used the one-room Great House as his personal home and office until 1630 when he moved across the Charles River to found the town of Boston. Charlestown is now part of Boston. The Great House remained a public building in Charlestown serving as a general meetinghouse for the Court of Assistants, the predecessor of the General Court. It was excavated by the Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL) in 1985 during surveys ahead of a proposed highway tunnel through Boston and Charlestown known as the Central Artery/Tunnel, or "Big Dig." It remains the oldest English colonial habitation site identified in Boston. This collection is part of the uncataloged 50-box Long Ordinary/Three Cranes Tavern collection.

- **The Long Ordinary/Three Cranes Tavern Site (1635-1775)**

Robert Long purchased the Winthrop Great House in 1635, added a large addition, and transformed it into both his family's home and a tavern/ordinary. Its central location within Charlestown, along with its neighboring seaport and marketplace, made it a popular destination for those individuals traveling to and living in the area. Following Robert's death and the transfer of the Tavern to his son John and John's wife Mary (Winslow) in 1663, the tavern began to be referred to as the "Three Cranes Tavern," and the new owners expanded the building again. John and Mary added a new private residence, wine cellar, hearth, walls, and brewery, all of which were documented during the survey. The tavern stood until it was destroyed on June 17, 1775 by British soldiers who burned Charlestown during the Battle of Bunker Hill. Archaeologists recovered foundations of the Great House and Long Ordinary along with thousands of 17th century artifacts, including an intact 17th century privy (outhouse). The uncataloged collection totals approximately 50,000 artifacts currently housed in 50 one-cubic-foot storage boxes.

- **The Smith House Site (1644-1691)**

Shipwright John Smith and his family lived in a house on the Charlestown waterfront sometime before 1644 until 1691. Archaeologists discovered the foundations of Smith's house in 1985, unexpectedly, beneath a later 18th century distillery site. The older house site was fully excavated by archaeologists from PAL in 1987. The artifacts include household items from the Smith family, a middle-class family of the early 17th century. The assemblage also includes pottery kiln fragments from the Smith's neighbor, Philip Drinker. Drinker moved to the neighboring property in 1635 and became the first English potter in New England. These pottery kiln fragments, which were likely used as fill in the late 17th century to cover the Smith House foundations, remain the only surviving evidence of Drinker's potting workshop and a significant part of the nation's early industrial history. In total, 22,072 artifacts housed in 30 1-cubic-foot boxes were recovered from this site. The paper inventory of these artifacts includes a total artifact count, but lacks detailed artifact descriptions and metadata of a complete artifact catalog.

- **The James Garrett House Site (1635-1656)**

Merchant James Garrett and his family moved from England to a house on the Charlestown shoreline in the early 1630s to escape the conflicts of the English Civil War. He lived on the property until returning to England in 1656, selling his land and house to Samuel Beadle. The foundations of his house were discovered by ICA as part of the archaeological surveys ahead of Boston's Big Dig. The archaeologists found a wooden cellar structure from Garrett's house with fills inside it dating to the 1640s-60s including artifacts suggesting Massachusetts Native American occupation just prior or concurrent to the Garrett occupation. The site's artifacts are housed in 20 cubic-foot boxes totaling approximately 20,000 artifacts.

When fully digitized, these 17th-century collections can contribute significantly to the celebrations and interpretations of the Boston 400th celebrations in 2030. Initial examination of these collections indicate they will include the full diversity of artifacts recorded by our cataloging system's functional category of metadata (see link in supporting documents for an example), including: architecture, arms,

commerce, education, food and beverage, furniture and household equipment, heating, industrial, lighting, literacy and arts, mechanical objects, medical and chemical, military, mortuary, person, recreation and leisure, religion and magic, containers, and transportation. These collections will be able to provide a more detailed, nuanced, and complete view into Boston's first years than existing historic documents and museum collections held by other institutions are able to, alone.

These four archaeological sites were excavated because they were deemed significant enough to be included in the National Register of Historic Places due to their documented historic significance and relatively intact archaeological nature at the time of their excavation.

Currently these collections are housed in non-archival storage bags, artifacts of multiple materials and types (iron and bone for example) are housed together in often-unsealed bags, and none are cataloged. Researchers, the general public, and other museums are not aware of these collections, and the lack of a complete catalog makes access and awareness of their contents impossible. Without this project, the conditions of the collections will degrade and their research potential will remain unknown beyond the general analysis conducted for their final report.

Four groups will directly benefit from this project:

- Boston 400th will benefit from a large assemblage of early 17th century artifacts being newly introduced and available to the public for study, interpretation, and exhibition.
- The public will benefit during the project through daily posts to our more than 20,000 social media followers publicizing the existence of the artifacts in these sites, promoting the grantor, and encouraging visitors and researchers to view and use our collections in person and online.
- The archaeological and historical research community will benefit from expanded access to data and images beyond the current limitations of direct in-person on-site access and leading to opportunities for researchers to contribute new contemporary analysis, interpretation, and publications of these artifact assemblages. See letters of support from stakeholding institutions are in the Supporting Documents section.
- The City Archaeology Program benefits from the digitization project because it will improve the stability and housing of the collections, increase the ability of the Program's staff to manage and search the contents of the collections, aid the staff in connecting the collections to potential researchers, and allow the staff to use the collections efficiently and effectively for exhibit and public outreach.
- Finally, the exhibits created by this project at the Laboratory will benefit the public, researchers, and the Program as they will allow for engagement with the actual artifacts from Boston's earliest English residents as well as to alert other institutions who may wish to incorporate our artifacts and their stories into their outreach activities closer to the 2030 anniversary.

The Project will advance a strategic plan of the Program: to digitize the legacy collections and make them accessible to the public. This Project will digitize a significant remaining portion of the uncataloged older collections at the Lab and make them accessible to staff, researchers, and the public through an online database and artifact images, and sharing the presence of these important collections with the public, researchers, and other institutions for the first time.

This Project will meet the goals of the Museums for America grant program's Collections Stewardship and Access category because it addresses a key goal in the Program's strategic plan (cataloging and digitization); it represents a proven and tested methodology for cataloging and digital dissemination to increase public access of the museum's collections; its work flow and scope are achievable and effective; and it produces tangible spreadsheets, databases, social media posts, and exhibits with measurable impacts through usage and visitor statistics. The Project strengthens the ability of the City of Boston Archaeology Program and Laboratory to serve our public.

## **Project Work Plan**

The Project will be performed by a team of four: a Project Director, Laboratory Manager, two Collections Technicians, and a small team of highly-trained volunteers. The Project will be supported by a Project Advisory Board. The Board was developed specifically for this project and consists of local and recognized professionals in archaeological collections management, historic preservation, public history, exhibition, and local Native studies. See the Project Staff document in Supporting Documents for full descriptions, names, and CVs of the team and the Board advisors' letters of commitment included in the Supporting Documents. This proposal has been reviewed by the Advisory Board.

The estimated 100,000 artifacts included in this Project will be made public through two key phases: Digitization and Dissemination.

### Digitization Phase:

The Program will utilize its tested Boston Digital Archaeology Program (BDAP) artifact processing protocols to achieve the initial digitization phase goals of this Project. The City Archaeologist (Project Director) developed and refined this set of artifact processing activities by combining the no longer-supported MS Access-based Massachusetts Artifact Tracking System (MATS) database and the Monticello-based Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (DAACS) into an in-house Google Cloud-based system that produces standardized spreadsheet catalogs. The fundamental structure of the catalog system is free and shareable to anyone with a Google account and cataloging can occur anywhere or on any device with an internet connection.

Most recently, these digitizing protocols have been thoroughly tested as part of a successful 2-year long NEH Humanities Collections and Reference Resources grant to digitize 180,000 artifacts from four Revolution-related sites in Boston (PW-264199-19), which will be concluding just prior to the commencement of this grant's proposed schedule.

The well-tested rate of digital processing of archaeological collections by the four trained and experienced Project staff and a small team of volunteers is **two boxes/week**. Digitizing the contents of the 100-box assemblage will take 1 year.

The products created during this phase of the project will include:

- ~100,000 rehoused artifact in ~70,000 labeled new archival plastic bags and 100 archival boxes
- 4 artifact catalog spreadsheets (.csv and .xls format)

- 70,000 high resolution archival TIFF images, and derivative JPEGs for Omeka.net upload
- Four collections containing 70,000 lots uploaded to bostonarchaeo.omeka.net artifact database

The BDAP protocols are:

- TASK 1: Sort artifacts into lots by provenience.
  - Lots defined as: a group of artifacts from the same provenience (vertical and horizontal location on a site) that can be described the same (material, decoration, part) in all ways except for size or weight.
  - Place artifacts into archival .4 mil zip-lock bags with permanent marker labels on the bags.
  - Performed by: Collections Technician, Project Director, Laboratory Manager, and volunteers.
  - Evaluation: Identifications confirmed by Project Director and Laboratory Manager. Response to issues: Additional training by Project Director in artifact IDs
- TASK 2: Catalog lot metadata in digital catalog
  - Artifact lot metadata includes: project name, site name, provenience, count, material type and subtypes, part, decoration, function, and comments.
  - Each artifact lot is given a unique database record number.
  - Metadata established and defined by DAACS and MATS.
  - Print high density polyethylene (HDPE) artifact tag with metadata and scale
  - Performed by: Collections Technicians. Supervised by: Laboratory manager.
  - Evaluation: monthly report of accuracy of 100 random lots cataloged. Response to issues: additional training in protocols, additional checking by Lab Manager.
- TASK 3: Photograph artifact lots
  - Create TIFF and JPEG images of each artifact lot (See link in supporting documents for an example)
  - Equipment: Nikon D3300 Digital SLR cameras, Interfit F5 Three-Head daylight Fluorescent Lighting Kit with Boom Arm, and light box
  - Performed by: Collections Technicians
  - Evaluation: Laboratory Manager performs an image audit to confirm an image for each lot. Response: Re-take poor photos or create missing photos.
- TASK 4: Upload lots onto Omeka.net artifact database using catalog metadata and JPEG image
  - Performed by: Laboratory Manager and Project Director
  - See link in supporting documents for an example.

#### Dissemination Phase:

Dissemination of the results of this project will be done through social media posts, a new webpage and web exhibit on boston.gov/archaeology for each assemblage, and a final exhibit at the Laboratory.

Collections Technicians will identify artifacts with engaging stories and appearances for social media posts shared with the more than 20,000 followers of the Program's Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram followers using the appropriate grantor-defined funding acknowledgement tag. These near-daily posts will provide the public with daily updates on the project, engage them in discussions on the artifacts,

and create awareness of the project and its results among the general public and researchers alike. Social media has been a primary and successful source of most of the Program's media opportunities and research visits.

The Project Director will create a webpage for each of the four sites included in this project on Boston.gov. See link in supporting documents for an example.

The webpages will each include a summary of the site history, the archaeological dig there, and the results of the dig, all compiled from the existing archaeological reports. The Director will also create a new Adobe Spark-based online exhibit for each of the collections focusing on artifact highlights that tell the stories of each site and their artifacts. Drafts of these web pages and exhibits will be distributed to the Advisory Board for comment. The web pages will serve as the clearinghouse and dissemination of digital products from the project including: the PDF/A scanned archaeological site report, artifact catalog spreadsheet, omeka.net database link to the artifact images, and a link to the online exhibit. Drafts of all web and exhibit products will be distributed among the Project Advisory Board for comments and editing before going live.

At the end of the digitizing phase, the Project Director and Laboratory Manager will assemble artifacts of the four archaeological sites into an on-site public exhibit on the Archaeology of Boston's 400th at the Laboratory. This exhibit will include approximately 100 artifacts, printed materials, and archival documents in a 100 square foot exhibit within the 200 square feet of museum exhibit space in the Laboratory's exhibit cases. A draft of the exhibit text and artifact list will be distributed to the Advisory Board for comment. The exhibit will be inclusive of the diverse histories and artifact types included on these sites, and it will remain up for six months. A final goal of this project is for this dissemination to result in increased scholarship and research on these sites and the inclusion of their data and artifacts in future public products during the 400th celebrations in 1630.

The Project has several risks, most of which were already encountered in the recent Covid-19 related shutdowns during our recent NEH-funded project, which has a similar scope of work. The primary risk of this project is the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, if shutdowns prevent easy access to the collections and exhibit during the 2021-2023 period though the Program and Laboratory have already weathered the pandemic well.

The Program and Laboratory are City-funded and do not have many of the same overhead costs and financial risks associated with traditional stand-alone museums that may rely on donors, admissions, and other sources of funding at direct risk of shutdowns. As such, though the Program was closed for over 6 months to the public, it has had no significant impact on staffing or project productivity due to COVID-19. However, if closures continue or return, there will be little justification in creating in-person exhibits at the Laboratory. Therefore, web-based exhibits are currently a primary goal of this Project, but these will be designed to have a parallel in-person experience if possible.

## **Project Results**

Once completed, scholarly access to these collections will increase. Currently, each of the collections included in this Project remain understudied by researchers. No analysis has included their entire

assemblages in detail as there has never been a catalog of their contents, and their grey literature reports represent a preliminary study of the artifacts. See Supporting Documents for a list of the archaeological reports associated with these four sites and publications related to their artifacts.

The majority of the research done on these sites was performed in the 1980s and lacks the inclusion of current methodological, theoretical, comparative, and technical analysis that could be done today. The digital data created by this project will be the primary and most-accessible means of interaction with the collections, but the Lab also has the capacity to accommodate multiple researchers, simultaneously. These collections still have the potential to yield new and significant information regarding daily life in the earliest years of Boston's European colonists and Native interactions.

At the completion of this project, each of the four collections will have been re-housed. This re-housing into proper archival plastic bags, organized by provenience, and sorted into artifact lots will greatly improve the overall storage conditions of the collection, their long-term stability and preservation, and their ability to be easily accessed by Program staff due to their proper organization. The sorting of the collections will improve their preservation by separating artifacts currently housed together that directly and negatively impact each other (iron artifacts housed in the same bags as leather shoes, for example). This will also allow for artifacts that need to be stored in different humidity or temperature conditions to be housed accordingly in the appropriate storage areas of the Laboratory.

The digital components of this Project, which includes digital catalog, photographs, searchable online database, website, report scans, and online exhibit will greatly improve access to the collections by all people, including Program staff, the public, and researchers, while also opening the usability and accessibility of the collections to a national audience. Because each artifact lot will have detailed metadata associated with it in the online database, including a photograph of the object with a scale, the necessity of in-person research will be limited allowing for researchers from outside regions to incorporate this research data into their work without the added expense and time of traveling to Boston.

The on-site results include an exhibition at the City Archaeology Lab focusing on Boston's earliest settlement and daily life in the 1630s, which will increase the visibility of the Laboratory to the public, encourage visitors to the Archives center, and co-benefit our neighbors in the building, including the City Archives. Additionally, artifacts from these collections will be made available for inter-museum loan to partner organizations participating in the celebration of Boston's 400th anniversary. The Massachusetts Historical Society, Revolutionary Spaces (formerly the Bostonian Society and Old South Meeting House), and Charlestown Preservation Society have each written a letter of support for this project (see Supporting Documents) and will be made aware of all products created by this Project.

In less than a decade, Boston has an incredible opportunity to shine a light on its history, its impacts to the nation's story, and to reveal the stories of the Native and European people who changed history through their presence, interactions, and the city they founded. By preparing these artifacts, now, through digital cataloging and exhibition with this IMLS Museums for America grant-funded project, the City of Boston Archaeology Program and Laboratory will place itself at the forefront of the Boston 400th anniversary preparations, allowing it to shine alongside the city's leading museums and institutions.

## Boston 400 Digital Archaeology Project

### Project Schedule

September 1, 2021–February 28, 2022: Smith House Site Digitization

- Director and Laboratory Manager prepare Smith House collection for cataloging, including confirming the entire collection is organized by provenience and correcting any out-of-sequence provenience bags. Laboratory Manager will create a spreadsheet with all provenience data to create individual site provenience numbers for the BDAP cataloging system and to track progress of cataloging and photography activities. (September–October)
- Collections Technicians sort, catalog, and photograph the Smith House artifacts (November–February)
- Project Director and Laboratory Manager upload images to omeka.net, create website for Smith House site on Boston.gov, create Adobe Spark web exhibit, seek Board feedback on products (February).
- Benchmark: Launch of digitized Smith House Site on March 1, 2021

February 1–April 30, 2022: Garrett House Site Digitization

- Director and Laboratory Manager prepare collection for cataloging. Laboratory Manager creates a provenience spreadsheet for the site (February).
- Collections Technicians sort, catalog, and photograph the Garrett House artifacts (March 1–April 8)
- Project Director and Laboratory Manager upload images to omeka.net, create website and web exhibit for Garrett House, and seek Board feedback on products (April)
- Benchmark: Launch of digitized Garrett House Site on April 30, 2022

March 1,–December 31, 2022: Great House and Long Ordinary/Three Cranes Tavern Site Digitization

- Director and Laboratory Manager prepare collection for cataloging. Laboratory Manager creates a provenience spreadsheet for the site (March).
- Collections Technicians sort, catalog, and photograph the Garrett House artifacts (April –November)
- Project Director and Laboratory Manager upload images to omeka.net, create website and web exhibit for Garrett House, and seek Board feedback on products (December)
- Benchmark: Launch of digitized Great House and Long Ordinary sites on January 1, 2023

January–August 31, 2023: Final Exhibit

- Project Director and Laboratory Manager compile artifacts and narratives for final exhibit at Archaeology Lab, write exhibit copy for web and Lab exhibit, seek Board feedback on products (January)
- Project Director and Laboratory Manager create web exhibit. Install exhibit at Lab on the archaeology of Boston’s 400th anniversary (February)
- Exhibit open to the public for 6 months: March 1–August 31
- Benchmark: Launch of web and Lab exhibit on the archaeology of Boston’s 400th anniversary on March 1, 2023.