



## **Museums for America**

Sample Application MA-30-17-0488-17

Project Category: Collections Stewardship

Funding Level: \$25,001-\$500,000

### **Shelburne Museum**

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$35,955

Amount of cost share: \$37,885

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Abstract
- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

Please note that the instructions for preparing applications for the FY2018 Museums for America grant program differ from those that guided the preparation of FY2017 applications. This year, the maximum that may be requested from IMLS is \$250,000. Be sure to use the instructions in the FY2018 Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

## **Abstract**

### **Textile and Needlework Tool Inventory, Condition Survey and Treatment Project**

Over a 17 month period, Shelburne Museum proposes to

- ☐ inventory, catalog, and conduct condition surveys of its 184 commemorative handkerchiefs and 101 examples of needlework tools,
- ☐ treat and mount a group of 53 embroidered samplers,
- ☐ explore stain removal and reduction methods for textiles with piled structures,
- ☐ treat and mount a group of 14 hooked rugs, and
- ☐ examine and prepare a treatment proposal for a needlework show cover on an upholstered armchair.

The textile collections at Shelburne Museum, one of its 10 core experiences, are featured on a rotating basis in the museum's Hat and Fragrance Textile Gallery and attract visitors and researchers from around the world. These proposed activities will enable staff to move forward with four of our highest priority activities in support of the museum's strategic plan with regard to improving collections stewardship.

With funding from IMLS and an anonymous donor, the museum will hire a textile conservator for an 11 month period to undertake the condition survey of the commemorative handkerchiefs, investigate options for controlling the movement of cleaning solutions within the pile of a hooked rug, treat and mount the samplers and hooked rugs, and examine and propose a treatment for the needlework upholstery cover. The balance of the time will be spent attracting and relocating a textile conservator to the museum and inventory and cataloging the commemorative handkerchiefs and needlework tools into the museum's collections management database. The museum's objects conservator will conduct the condition survey of the needlework tools. At the completion of this project, Shelburne Museum's entire collection of embroidered samplers will be stabilized and properly mounted for exhibition. Fifteen hooked rugs will be stabilized and fully prepared for exhibition. Two hundred and eighty-five more artifacts with digital images will have been added to the collections management database and, taking into account the updated information following treatment, we will have updated condition information for over 350 works in the collection. Summary reports and budgets generated from the condition surveys and treatment proposals created in the course of this project will improve our ability to plan and raise funds to support improving the manner in which we store these objects as well as our ability to plan future exhibitions that include these objects.

The challenge of controlling the movement of cleaning agents through hooked rug structures was identified following a 2014-2015 IMLS Museums for America funded project to stabilize and clean hooked rugs in the collection, and thus the opportunity to explore various methodologies further was added to this project. The textile conservator will prepare a white paper detailing the results of practical investigations into controlling the movement of cleaning solutions through the pile of a hooked rug so that other textile conservators may benefit from this work.

Because so much of this project is based on numbers of objects inventoried, surveyed and treated, we will determine our success based on the number of actions completed over the course of the 17 month project.

## **Project Justification**

*What do you propose to do?*

Over a 17 month period, Shelburne Museum proposes to inventory and enter its collection of 184 commemorative handkerchiefs and about 101 needlework tools into its collections management database, conduct a condition survey of the needlework tools, and attract and hire a textile conservator for an 11 month period to perform the following work:

- conduct a condition survey of 184 commemorative handkerchiefs.
- make recommendations for improvements that should be made to their housing and best practices for their display,
- treat and mount a group of 53 samplers,
- examine and prepare a treatment proposal to stabilize the needlework cover on an armchair,
- explore methods for removing grime and staining from hooked rugs, and
- stabilize and prepare a group of 14 hooked rugs for exhibition, rendering these objects safer to handle, and available to be safely displayed.

*What high-priority collections-related need, problem, or challenge will your project address and how was it identified?*

As part of the museum's strategic planning process, the senior registrar and objects conservator worked together to determine what collections need to be inventoried, entered into the collections management system, and surveyed for condition over the next 5 years. The textile collections at Shelburne Museum are well known, attracting visitors and researchers from around the world. To preserve these light-sensitive artifacts while meeting visitor need, these collections are displayed on a rotating basis in the museum's Hat and Fragrance Textile Gallery. Presently visitors can experience 4 exhibitions entirely composed of Shelburne Museum's collections in that building: samplers, woven coverlets, quilts and hooked rugs. Textiles are also on permanent view in domestic interior and gallery settings in 6 more of the museum's 38 exhibition buildings. Textiles are commonly included in changing exhibitions in the museum's Pizzagalli Center for Arts and Education, and requested for loan. Therefore, inventory, cataloging, proper care, and accessibility of the textile collections are among our highest priorities. This project will enable us to make forward movement on 4 high priority collections stewardship initiatives.

Despite this importance, portions of the textile collection have not yet been inventoried or entered into the collection management database, rendering them more difficult for the staff to access, physically and intellectually. Although the museum mounted an exhibition of about twenty commemorative handkerchiefs 9 years ago, neither the needlework tool or commemorative handkerchief collections have been substantially on view for over a decade.

An in-depth examination and treatment proposal is required for an actively deteriorating needlework show cover on an armchair. Deterioration is due, in part, to stresses imposed by sprung springs in the seat. It is displayed in one of the museum's most visited spaces, the living room of the museum's recreation of its founder's New York City apartment containing wall paneling and furnishings from the original location, including paintings by Rembrandt, Corot, and Manet. One other needlework covered chair displayed in this space underwent stabilization in 2016. This is the next chair to be addressed.

The 53 samplers to be treated were acquired after the rest of the sampler collection was surveyed, stabilized, and mounted for storage and exhibition using acid-free materials as part of an IMLS-funded conservation project in 2000. By removing this group of 53 from their current mounts, made of acidic materials, stabilizing and

re-mounting them using acid free materials, preservation of these works will be enhanced, and Shelburne Museum's entire collection of samplers will be available for researchers and display.

The museum's collection of hooked rugs is displayed on a rotating basis in Hat and Fragrance Textile Gallery. Because of the museum's tradition of showing hooked rugs, most of which were constructed as floor covers, on walls, candidates for display must be robust enough structurally to hang with support from a mount. In the course of the 2014-15 IMLS MFA Hooked Rug Conservation project conservators were able to identify and articulate what makes for a good candidate for hanging, and adapted our traditional Velcro mount to improve support offered by the slanted walls covered with cotton duck within the hooked rug gallery.

The conservators who worked on the hooked rug project also determined that storing a rug prepared with the mount on a roll created detrimental stresses within the rug's ground fabric. The 14 rugs chosen for this project were identified as needing conservation treatment, yet are sufficiently robust that they can be displayed on a slanted wall with support, and stored flat in a storage unit fabricated in the course of the 2014-2015 IMLS-MFA Hooked Rug Conservation project. Therefore, they are of high priority for treatment.

Perhaps one of the more disappointing outcomes of the 2014-15 hooked rug project were our results from attempts to remove or reduce stains. Both textile conservators involved in the project found controlling movement of cleaning solutions through the pile structure to be challenging and scantily discussed in conservation literature. The textile conservator will spend a month exploring stain reduction options for piled structures in advance of treating collection rugs and share resulting observations with the conservation community.

*Who or what will benefit from your project?*

Curatorial and collections staff will have a stronger understanding of the collection, the state of its preservation and housing needs. The summary reports for the condition surveys will include budgets, planning to improve the storage conditions for these objects and the kind of work that will be required to stabilize so that we may undertake these actions in coming years. Staff will be able to access digital images of those objects for planning purposes as well as have baseline information to monitor condition. The survey summary reports and the proposal for the needlework cover on the chair will be the basis for future fund-raising and actions. Our entire sampler collection will be stabilized, properly mounted, and properly housed for storage. Conservators will have a greater understanding of how to control the movement of cleaning solutions through piled structures. The results of this practical research will be made available to our colleagues via a white paper. More hooked rugs will be stabilized and ready for exhibition - in fact, these are the last 14 rugs suitable for hanging and stored flat that require such treatment. Our curators will be able to display collections objects that either have never been shown at Shelburne Museum or haven't been on view for decades. Our visitors will benefit.

Because the surveys and treatment work will be undertaken at the museum, curators and collections staff will have greater awareness of the objects that are the subject of this work, and gain a better understanding of factors influencing their stability while on display in a manner that is not possible if the work is undertaken by freelance conservators away from the museum. The textile collections as a whole will benefit.

*How will your project advance your institution's strategic plan and how will it address the goals of the Museums for America program and the Collections Stewardship project category?*

More collection objects will be inventoried, surveyed for condition, and entered into the collections management database, and more objects will be properly housed and ready for exhibition. We will have extended our use of digital tools in the form of digital photography using digital targets as recommended in the *AIC Guide to Digital Documentation* and Google Form-based survey forms uploaded to our collections management database.

to collect and organize information about the condition of the collection. These actions specifically address 3 of Shelburne Museum's tactics to achieve its collections stewardship goals.

The project will provide us with guidance as to what our next steps should be with regard to future treatment and rehousing projects, and improve our ability to access and use these objects in exhibitions, programs, and online activities. It will enable us to improve their management, preservation, and care.

## **Project Work Plan**

*What specific activities, including evaluation and performance measurements, will you carry out?*

### **1. Attract and Hire a Textile Conservator for the 11 month survey and treatment project.**

The objects conservator will conduct a search for a textile conservator to undertake the survey and treatment work. During the hiring process, candidates will be interviewed by the objects conservator and the senior registrar.

### **2. Inventory and Condition Survey**

The inventory, initial record photography, and data entry for 184 commemorative handkerchiefs and 101 needlework tools will be undertaken by the assistant registrar. Needlework tools are three-dimensional artifacts made of a variety of materials including metal, basketry, painted wood, textiles, and glass beads. They include pin cushions, sewing baskets, and sewing kits. Most of the commemorative handkerchiefs are printed cotton; others have images woven into the fabric as damask, and some are embroidered. The handkerchiefs underwent a cataloging process on paper in the 1960s and were photographed in the late 1980s, but locations were not assigned to specific boxes and they have not been entered into the collections management database. The needlework tools are incompletely inventoried and photographed, haphazardly cataloged, and variously housed in boxes. Examples of catalog pages for objects from these collections are found in [Supportingdoc2.pdf](#). The tools and handkerchiefs are stored in the same facility on the museum's grounds.

Basic data about each object will include the object's ID Number; Object Category; Object Name; Title or Descriptive Title; Maker, if known; Materials; Measurements; and Current Location. Shelburne Museum uses Mimsy xg as its collections management database, and it requires that a basic object record be in place prior to entry of condition information. Art handlers will move the boxes containing the needlework tools and the commemorative handkerchiefs to the museum's collections management processing area for this work to be done. The processing area includes a small photo area so that basic record images can be taken. The objects conservator will be available to the assistant registrar should she require assistance with handling or have questions about materials that make up these objects during this first phase.

The conservators have built condition survey tools using Google Forms to automatically arrange the data in a spreadsheet so that it can be uploaded directly into Mimsy xg, make data entry more efficient, and ensure that vocabulary is standardized, enhancing the staff's ability to search the database efficiently. Our forms can be found in [Supportingdoc1.pdf](#). The Google Forms software creates graphs as data is entered, rendering resulting data easier to visualize, and summary reports are easier to write. The condition survey tool for the sampler collection has been adapted for the commemorative handkerchiefs, and the survey will be conducted by the textile conservator. The condition survey tool for composite objects will be used for the needlework tool collection. The condition of the needlework tools will be assessed by the museum's object conservator.

### **3. Conservation treatment of 53 samplers.**

The 2016 survey summary and treatment plans for each sampler are included in [Treatment.pdf](#). New mounting boards for the samplers will be assembled and covered by volunteers working under the textile conservator's supervision prior to the textile conservator attaching the samplers to the mounts.

#### **4. Examination and proposal development for the needlework cover on an arm chair.**

Creating an accurate proposal and time estimate for the treatment of this chair is not possible unless the chair is partially de-upholstered so that the construction can be observed and the condition of underlying layers can be assessed. Because the field of upholstery connoisseurship is so very specialized, we are delighted that Deborah Trupin, a highly respected practitioner and educator in the area of non-invasive upholstery conservation, has agreed to serve as a consultant for this portion of the project. Ms. Trupin will work with the textile conservator over two days to partially de-upholster and examine the chair cover as well as collaborate with the textile conservator on the resulting treatment proposal. Because there is damage to the chair stretchers, the objects conservator will take the opportunity to address the chair frame's structural issues that are not covered by upholstery. A catalog entry and images of the chair can be found in [Supportingdoc3.pdf](#).

#### **5. An exploration of stain removal/reduction options for textile objects with a pile structure**

One challenge that was not quite solved in the 2014-2015 hooked rug conservation treatment project was controlling the movement of the cleaning solution through the pile structure. We have acquired a hooked rug stained with dye bleed and grime to be used to test suction cleaning and poulticing options that were not explored extensively during the previous hooked rug conservation treatment project due to time constraints and concern that repeated wetting could cause damage to the fragile jute grounds through which the pile was worked. Since this rug is not considered part of the accessioned collection, the textile conservator will be allowed to explore a number of stain removal protocol options, including a range of wicking materials and suction, without that fear of causing damage to an accessioned object. The results of the cleaning tests will be summarized in a white paper that will be made available to members of the conservation community, publicized through the conservation electronic mailing lists as well as through the museum's blog and social media.

#### **6. Conservation treatment of 15 hooked rugs.**

Specific treatment actions suggested for each of these rugs are included in [Treatment.pdf](#). Generally, the rugs require stain reduction or removal, securing loose pile loops, compensation of losses, application of patches or supports, and application of dust covers and hanging mounts. Stain removal options will be informed by the work undertaken on the test rug, described above.

*What are the risks to the project and are they accounted for in the work plan?*

From previous experience, we know that it can be difficult to attract a conservator to suburban Vermont for a relatively short term contract such as this one. Thus, a longer period time to hire in a textile specialist than might be necessary in a more urban location was included in the project. We intentionally created a varied project appropriate to an entry-level conservator, hopefully an especially attractive opportunity.

The overall project is scheduled with the museum's overall priorities in mind. We have front-loaded the inventory and cataloging project so that basic information is present in the database and identifying numbers will be confirmed prior to the condition survey so that the condition information can be uploaded directly into the collections management database. Although undertaking the inventory of commemorative handkerchiefs and needlework tools in advance of the textile conservator coming on board will double the handling each object will receive, in our experience with other condition survey projects, ensuring that each object is properly identified with a number and recorded in the collections management database ensures that the condition survey proceeds smoothly. Time estimates are based on the staff's experience undertaking similar tasks. The textile objects that

will be treated were recently examined by a textile conservator and discussed with the objects conservator. One month is scheduled for the experiments into stain reduction and the final report will be given a deadline for completion.

*Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?*

With input from the museum's director of collections and senior registrar Barbara Rathburn, this project has been planned and will be managed by object conservator Nancie Ravenel. Ms. Ravenel manages the museum's conservation lab, and worked with the textile conservators who were hired to undertake the work on the 1999 floor cover survey, the 2000 sampler survey and treatment project, and the 2014-15 rug conservation grant project. The textile conservator hired for this project will report to Ms. Ravenel and work in the conservation lab with her. She will orient the textile conservator to the survey forms, the museum's collections management software, and documentation workflows. To ensure consistency, Ms. Ravenel will assist the textile conservator with tasks such as ordering materials, image processing, digital file naming, and filing of documentation, as needed. Ms. Ravenel will undertake the condition survey of the needlework tools.

The inventory and cataloging of the commemorative handkerchiefs and needlework tools will be undertaken by assistant registrar/librarian/archives manager Allison Gillette. Ms. Gillette works on inventory and cataloging projects related to the museum's permanent collection two days per week. The other three days of each week are devoted to responsibilities in the library and archives. Ms. Ravenel will be available to Ms. Gillette to assist with handling and with identifying the materials from which they are composed during the inventory and cataloging process, should she need it. The textile conservator will undertake the condition survey of the commemorative handkerchiefs, the examination of the armchair's needlework cover and treatment proposal, conservation treatment of the samplers and the hooked rugs.

*When and in what sequence will your activities occur?*

If awarded, the project will follow the schedule indicated in the application materials. We will begin with advertising the textile conservator position and starting the inventory and data entry of the commemorative handkerchiefs on October 1, 2017. Once the textile conservator has started and begun treatment of the samplers, we will schedule volunteers to cover acid-free mat board with thin batting and appropriate show covers in preparation for mounting those works. Examination and condition assessment will be undertaken in tandem with treatment activities to provide the textile conservator a variety of tasks from day to day.

*What financial, personnel, and other resources will you need to carry out the activities?*

Through the award of grants or other special funding, the conservation lab is able to expand the expertise of the permanent staff by hiring specialist conservators on a temporary or contract basis. Thanks to funding provided by a donor, the museum has funds to hire a temporary entry-level conservator for about 5 months of work. This funding will be used as a financial match for this project. We are requesting funding for an additional 6 months of a textile conservator's time, funding for the textile conservator to attend a professional conference, funding to support a visit from a consulting textile conservator, and materials used in treatment and software and digital targets for use in photo documentation, as recommended by the AIC Digital Documentation Task Force. We will match the balance with time spent on the project by Nancie Ravenel, Allison Gillette, and volunteers.

The inventory and cataloging activity will take place in the museum's Collection Management Building's Processing Area, a climate controlled work space dedicated to such projects. It includes a photography area and is adjacent to a secure, climate-controlled storage space, the collections records room, and the assistant registrar's office. Condition survey and treatment activity will take place in the museum's conservation lab, a 1400 sq. ft.

secure space with equipped with suction platens, hand sewing tools commonly used in textile conservation, a sewing machine, HEPA vacuums with suction control, a photography area, task exhaust, a deionizing column for water, polarizing light microscope for pigment and fiber identification, and binocular microscope. The conservation lab office includes three desk-top computers to access the collections management database, write treatment reports, and process documentation images.

*How will you track your progress toward achieving your intended results?*

Progress will be tracked numerically as objects are surveyed and treated from month to month. We have found that creating a spreadsheet of the various steps that need to be taken in documentation and treatment is very useful for projects such as this. The collections department, which includes the registrars, conservator, preparator, and art handler, meet every other week, and the project's progress will be an agenda point.

*How and with whom will you share your project's results?*

The results of the inventory, condition surveys, and treatment projects will be shared with the museum's curators as part of standard operating procedure. The survey and treatment reports will be available to them, registrars, preparator, and art handlers through the collections management database. Results of the project will also be shared with the museum's board as part of the department's reports. The conservation lab has an active presence on the museum's social media feeds and member newsletter, by contributing images to the museum's Twitter and Facebook updates and articles for the newsletter and blog. Especially interesting artifacts examined or treated as part of the project will be featured on various social media platforms through our #TextileTuesday campaign, and articles about various aspects of the project will be published in the blog and member Newsletter. Results of the experiments in removing stains from hooked rug pile will be written up as a white paper, publicized through the electronic mailing list for the American Institute for Conservation's Textile Specialty Group as well as the museum's blog. It will be made freely available on request.

### **3. Project Results**

*Referring to your Project Justification, describe your project's intended results that will address the need, problem, or challenge you have identified.*

At the end of this project, 285 more artifacts with digital images and their condition information will be added to the collections management database. The collections department will have plans and budgets for treating and rehousing those objects, as necessary. We will have a treatment proposal and budget for addressing the conservation needs for a highly visible, but fragile, object on view. All samplers in the collection will be properly housed and ready for rotation into the exhibition. Fourteen more hooked rugs will be stabilized and ready for use in exhibition rotation.

*How will the care, condition, management, access to, or use of the museum collections and/or records that define the focus of your project improve?*

Because the needlework tools and commemorative handkerchiefs will be inventoried, and described within the collections management database, they will be more likely to be viewed by the curators within the database and used in exhibitions. We will have generated data as to what degree these collections are presently in displayable condition and what steps will need to be taken to improve their state. We will have a plan to move forward with the treatment of the armchair with the needlework show cover, and documents that can be used to secure funds for that work. By adding the full range of digital imaging targets to our photo documentation tools, conservators will produce images that are processed in a more consistent manner and include evidence of the illumination directionality, and, thus, better for monitoring color and surface changes over time.



By undertaking more practical research into stain removal on hooked rugs, the conservator working on collection objects should be able to make better decisions as to what techniques might be more successful when working on the collection rugs. The samplers and rugs that will be treated will be cleaner, more stable, and their preservation enhanced with attachment of appropriate display mounts.

*What tangible products (e.g. reports, inventories, catalogs, treatment plans, publications, presentations, and databases) will result from your project?*

Because of activity related to the inventories, surveys, treatment reports, and post-treatment condition reports, as result of this project, we will have updated digital photography and condition information for nearly 350 collection artifacts. In addition to the object-by-object condition survey records, we will have summary survey reports with budgets for undertaking recommendations made. We will have a white paper that considers best practices for removing stains and grime from hooked rugs, a work that we will be able to share with colleagues and refer to in the future when we are next able to undertake conservation treatment work on another group of rugs.

*How will you sustain the benefit(s) of your project?*

This project is not an end, but rather a mid-point in our process of improving our stewardship of the textile collections. Condition survey reports and treatment plans created as part of this project will provide us with information and an action plan with which we will be able to seek funding to continue the work. This project will be a model for moving forward planning and treatment that could be extended into other areas of the collection.

### Schedule of Completion-October 2017 through September 2018

[illegible]

**Schedule of Completion – October 2018 through February 2019**

	Activity	Oct. 2018	Nov. 2018	Dec. 2018	Jan. 2019	Feb. 2019
7	Conservation treatment of hooked rugs					

1. Objects Conservator Nancie Ravenel will recruit, and along with Collections Department Director Barbara Rathburn, interview and hire a textile conservator.
2. Art handlers will move the needlework tools and commemorative handkerchief collections to the Collections Management Building so that assistant registrar Allison Gillette can inventory, catalog, photograph and enter the resulting data into the museum's collections management database system.
3. Art handlers will move the project samplers to the conservation lab. The textile conservator will treat 53 samplers and mount them to acid-free boards covered by conservation volunteers over a 3 month period. During this time period, the textile conservator will attend the American Institute for Conservation annual meeting.
4. Art handlers will move the needlework tools and commemorative handkerchiefs to the conservation lab. Object conservator Nancie Ravenel will undertake a condition survey of the needlework tools. The textile conservator will undertake a condition survey of the collection of commemorative handkerchiefs.
5. Consulting textile conservator Deborah Trupin will work with the textile conservator to examine a needlework show cover on an upholstered armchair and the upholstery's underpinnings to devise a proposal for treatment. The findings, plans for improving housing and treatment, and budgets to undertake that work will be summarized in reports.
6. The textile conservator will investigate options for controlling the movement of cleaning solutions through the structure of a hooked rug using suction and a variety of wicking materials and write a white paper about any findings and conclusions made as a result of this testing.
7. Art handlers will move project rugs to the conservation lab. Conservation treatment of 14 hooked rugs including application of display mounts.