



Museums for America

Sample Application MA-31-17-0374-17
Project Category: Collections Stewardship
Funding Level: \$5,000-\$25,000

Mark Twain House

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$24,575
Amount of cost share:	None

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

The Mark Twain House & Museum seeks funding for the professional conservation treatment of collection items that belonged to Samuel Clemens (“Mark Twain”) and his family, and that are on display at the museum. The items to be treated include four pieces of nineteenth-century furniture and a carved wooden glove box that was made by Jean Clemens, Samuel’s daughter.

The project will take place over a nine-month period, beginning October 1, 2017. During this period, the objects will be treated by professional conservators with expertise in the care of furniture and other wooden objects. The specific treatment of each object will be done in accordance with a treatment plan for that object identified in a Furniture Conservation Survey of the museum’s furniture collection. After the treatment activities are completed, the furniture will be put on display at the museum, and the box will be available for display in exhibitions.

The Mark Twain House is a National Historic Landmark. It was designed and built for Clemens, and he and his family lived there from 1874 to 1891, which were the most successful and productive years of his career. During that period, he wrote some of his greatest works, including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Life on the Mississippi* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. The interior of the house has been carefully restored to its condition in 1881, after the first floor and other public spaces in the house were decorated by Louis Comfort Tiffany and his innovative design firm, Louis C. Tiffany & Co., Associated Artists. Each year, about seventy thousand people from across the country and around the world tour the Mark Twain House.

The intended outcome of this project will be that items belonging to and used by Samuel Clemens and his family will be successfully treated, so that they will be available to the general public, as well as to scholars and researchers, for many years to come. Thus, the project will be deemed to be a success if the objects’ condition problems are addressed in accordance with their respective treatment plans.

These historic objects are invaluable to the accurate and comprehensive interpretation of the landmark Mark Twain House, and to the museum’s mission to promote the important legacy of Samuel Clemens. They provide unique insight into the life of one of America’s most important cultural figures, including his family life, which presented challenges faced by many of his era and which significantly impacted his beliefs and work. The objects also offer valuable information about upper class domestic life of the Gilded Age era, and illustrate late nineteenth century trends in furniture and décor. Thus, as a result of the project, unique pieces of America’s cultural history will be preserved for the benefit of current and future generations.

NARRATIVE

Project Justification

The Mark Twain House & Museum seeks funding for the professional conservation treatment of five historic objects in its collections. All of the objects have strong connections to Samuel Clemens (more popularly known by his pen name “Mark Twain”). Thus, they significantly support the museum’s mission to preserve Mark Twain’s legacy and to educate the public about the author, his work and his era. It is critical to have them treated, so that they will be preserved for the future and the museum can continue to make them accessible to the public.

The museum was founded to preserve Samuel Clemens’ Hartford, Connecticut home. The home was designed and built for Clemens, and he and his family lived there from 1874 to 1891. During that period, he wrote some of his greatest works, including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Life on the Mississippi* and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. Clemens said that the years he lived in Hartford were the happiest and most productive of his life, and he described the family’s house as “the loveliest home that ever was.” Due to financial reverses, the family reluctantly closed the house in 1891 and relocated to Europe, where the cost of living was cheaper. In 1896, while on a visit to Hartford, Samuel’s eldest daughter Susy died in the house. As a result, her mother found it too difficult to return to the home, and the family never lived there again. It was sold in 1903.

The historic Mark Twain House provides valuable insight into the life and times of Samuel Clemens, as well as into design trends of the Gilded Age. The first floor and other public spaces in the house were decorated by Louis Comfort Tiffany and his innovative design firm, Louis C. Tiffany & Co., Associated Artists. In fact, the house is one of only two domestic interiors designed by Tiffany that are open to the public. Associated Artists embraced the Aesthetic Movement of the late nineteenth century, and the house’s interior displays the major themes of this movement. The interior of the house has been carefully restored to its condition in 1881, after the Tiffany decoration. It has been furnished with period appropriate furniture, household objects, and decorative items, in accordance with a detailed Furnishings Plan that was prepared for the museum in 2004 by Dr. Jacquetta M. Haley, of Haley Research & Consulting. The furnishings plan was funded by a grant from the federal Save America’s Treasures program.

In addition to the landmark Mark Twain House, the museum’s campus includes a modern Museum Center, which features an auditorium, classrooms, a film theater, visitor amenities, a permanent Visitor Orientation Exhibition that provides an overview of Sam Clemens’ life, and special exhibition galleries where temporary exhibitions are presented.

The museum is fortunate to have in its collections many items that belonged to Sam Clemens and his family. Most of these objects are displayed in the house or in the exhibition galleries of the Museum Center, including the pieces that are the subject of this project. These items are invaluable to the accurate and comprehensive interpretation of the landmark Mark Twain House. They provide unique insight into the life of one of America’s most important cultural figures. They also offer valuable information about upper class domestic life of Clemens’ era.

The Historic Items to be Conserved. The items which the museum seeks to have conserved are:

- A wooden **Glove Box**, with intricate decorative carving, that was made in 1900 by Jean Clemens, one of Sam Clemens' three daughters, when she was about twenty years old. The glove box belonged to Jean's sister Clara; the museum acquired it from the estate of Clara's long-time personal secretary. The box's corners are separating and require rejoining. Some short-grain losses in the wood also need to be addressed.

The glove box is a significant piece in the museum's collections because of the insight it provides into the life of Jean Clemens. Jean was diagnosed with epilepsy at age fifteen. In keeping with contemporary medical theory, she was forced to live a very restricted life, and she spent much of her young adult life in sanitariums. It was believed that crafts were good therapy for those with epilepsy and Jean became a very talented woodcarver, an activity she would enjoy until her death at age twenty-nine. Poignantly, she had hoped that her carving would be a way to gain some financial independence and autonomy over her life, and perhaps allow her to have a home of her own one day. Unfortunately, although she was able to sell her work and earn some of her own money, the proceeds were not enough for her to realize her goals.

The museum has utilized the glove box to tell Jean Clemens' story and to celebrate her artistry. Jean's story also serves to educate the public about the challenges and stigma faced by persons with epilepsy and similar diseases at the turn of the century; and about the impact her illness had on her family and on her father's beliefs, in particular his religious skepticism. The box has been displayed in a number of special exhibitions at the museum over the years, including a 2016-17 special exhibition about the Clemens daughters; a 2009 special exhibition about Jean; and an exhibition of highlights of the collections that was on display from 2005 to 2008. The museum will continue to display the box in exhibitions and in connection with public programs. It will also be available for loan to other institutions for exhibition.

- A circa 1875 walnut **Crib** that was used by the Clemens children during their childhood in their Hartford home. After the Clemens girls outgrew it, the crib was given to the family's former cook. The museum acquired it from the cook's son. The crib is currently on display in a special exhibition about the lives of the Clemens daughters. It is being used to tell the story of two instances when the girls' nurse Rosa averted disaster by rescuing the children from fire – a common hazard for 19th century children. In the first episode, Rosa rescued daughter Clara when the crib bedding caught on fire from an alcohol lamp that was fueling a steam machine being used to treat Clara's diphtheria. In the second instance, Rosa saved daughter Jean when a spark from the fireplace set the crib bedding on fire. The crib needs extensive repairs; it has many loose joints, is missing a rail and casters, and has damaged varnish.
- A child's upholstered **Rocking Chair** that belonged to eldest daughter Susy Clemens. The chair is on display in the library and is significant to the interpretation of this room. The library was the primary family room in the house, and features in many family anecdotes, including those about Sam Clemens' practice of telling stories to his young daughters in the

evening. Susy and her younger sisters sat in the chair during this cherished family ritual. The chair was among furniture that the family had auctioned off when they sold the Hartford house in 1903. It was later reacquired by the museum from a Hartford resident. The chair features fringe trim that needs to be repaired.

- A Winthrop-type, slant-top **Desk** that was used by Olivia Clemens, Sam's wife. She used the desk as she corresponded with family and friends; ran her Hartford household, including managing a staff of eight servants, entertaining frequently, and overseeing the education of her daughters; and helped her husband with his work by reviewing and editing his drafts. Sam described her as "my faithful, judicious, and painstaking editor." The museum acquired the desk in 1929 from Mrs. Clemens' daughter Clara. It primarily needs treatment to address wood losses.

The crib, rocking chair, and desk are essential pieces to a visitor's understanding of the Mark Twain House. Although the house was where Sam Clemens did much of his most important work, it was first and foremost a family home, where Clemens enjoyed the happiest days of his life surrounded by his family. The rocking chair and desk are on display in the house, in accordance with the Furnishings Plan. As mentioned above, the crib is currently on display as part of a special exhibition on the Clemens daughters. Previously, it was featured in a 2013-14 exhibition about the family's servants. After conservation, all three pieces will be put on display in the house.

- A mid-19th century **Office Chair** from the printing office in Keokuk, Iowa, where Sam Clemens worked as a young man. In 1855, at the age of twenty, Clemens moved to Keokuk to work at his older brother's printing company. The office in which he worked was maintained in its original condition from 1859 until 1948. At that point, the building's owner, the Home Insurance Company of New York, transported the room's contents, including its furniture, printing equipment, and even its floor, to New York City, where the office was re-created in the company's museum. The insurance company later donated the furniture and equipment to the museum, where they are exhibited in the Visitor Orientation Exhibition.

The chair and other Keokuk office objects illuminate an important period in Clemens' career, when he transitioned from a printer to a journalist. His first professional writing was published in Keokuk newspapers. In addition, his experiences as a printer would later lead him to invest in a machine that was supposed to revolutionize typesetting. This disastrous investment would leave him nearly bankrupt, which forced him to leave his Hartford home and to embark on a worldwide speaking tour to repair his finances. This very successful tour would be recounted in his book *Following the Equator*. Ironically, Clemens made his debut as a public speaker in Keokuk, when he gave an after-dinner talk at a printers' banquet in 1856.

The chair needs treatment to address wood losses and to remove residue of past cleaning. After it is treated, it will be returned to display in the Museum Center.

The Benefits of the Project. After they are treated, all of the furniture pieces will be put on permanent display in either the Mark Twain House or the Visitor Orientation Exhibition. The glove box will be displayed occasionally in special exhibitions in the Museum Center or in connection with public programs. When not on display, the box will be in appropriate protective storage.

Each year, more than seventy-five thousand people from across the country and around the world tour the Mark Twain House and attend the museum's many public programs, including its special exhibitions. Thus, the project will benefit the many thousands of people who will visit the museum in the future and have the opportunity to experience the conserved objects. The family items will support the historic interpretation of the home, and provide the museum's visitors with an accurate representation of life in the household and of the individuals who lived there. The office chair will similarly help to evoke a pivotal period in Clemens' life. In addition, the items illustrate late nineteenth century trends in furniture and décor; and illuminate the evolution of Samuel Clemens from a poor boy of the south to an upper-class Connecticut Yankee.

The objects will also satisfy the public's interest in seeing items that actually belonged to Samuel Clemens and his family. This interest is frequently expressed by visitors who tour the Mark Twain House. In addition, in evaluations of recent special exhibitions, many visitors have stated that the opportunity to see actual family belongings was what they liked best about the exhibitions. In fact, a number of visitors to the museum's current special exhibition, in which the crib is displayed, have said that that piece was their favorite item on display.

All of the conserved items will be available to researchers seeking to learn about 19th century domestic furnishings; about life in the Clemens household; about Clemens' experiences in Keokuk and the printing business; or about the life of his daughter and the challenges she faced. The museum's furniture collection has been studied by various scholars; has been featured in documentaries and television shows about Mark Twain and/or his era, including Ken Burns' *Mark Twain*, the PBS series *Pride of Place*, A&E Channel's *America's Castles*, and HGTV's *Restore America*; and has been included in books and periodicals, including the book *Identifying American Furniture*, *Victorian Homes* magazine, and *Antiques* magazine.

Project Background. In 1990, the museum had a Collections Conservation Assessment done by Marc A. Williams, President of American Conservation Consortium, Ltd. Mr. Williams recommended that the museum have conservation consultants conduct item-by-item surveys of its collections. The museum has followed this recommendation and has had several of its collections surveyed by conservation professionals. These include a Furniture Conservation Survey that was done, in 2007, by Hugh Glover, Furniture Conservator at Williamstown Art Conservation Center of Williamstown, Massachusetts. All of the pieces included in this project were assessed by Mr. Glover as part of that survey, and their conservation needs were identified. The museum has also had certain items in its collections individually assessed by conservation professionals due to their significance or condition.

The museum has been having collection items conserved, in accordance with the findings of the conservation assessments, as requisite funding is secured. In determining which items to have conserved, the museum is following guidelines adopted by its Collections Committee. This

committee, which advises the museum's Board of Trustees and which is composed of trustees and relevant professionals, has established a set of priorities for the on-going conservation treatment of collection items. The first priority is items that actually belonged to Samuel Clemens or his family members. Within this category, preference is to be given to objects that have a direct connection to the Hartford house, particularly during the 1881-1891 time period which is consistent with the house's restoration, or that require immediate attention due to their condition. All five items included in this project meet one or more of these criteria: they were owned by members of the Clemens family; several were used by the family in the Hartford home; and the glove box, crib and office chair were identified in the Furniture Conservation Survey as top priorities for treatment due to their condition. In addition, the furniture pieces will be prominently displayed in the house or Museum Center.

The project will advance the museum's Strategic Plan, which sets as one of its major strategic goals: "Maintain the highest standards of preservation with respect to the organization's historic campus and collections." The plan recognizes that the preservation of the Mark Twain House and the museum's collections are at the core of the institution's mission and operations, and makes the restoration of collection items a priority for the organization.

Project Work Plan

The project is relatively simple. The museum's staff will finalize the project schedule with the conservators, including scheduling the transportation of the items to the conservation studio; consult with the conservators throughout the project; update the museum's collection records to reflect the project activities; and, at the conclusion of the project, have the objects put on display in the Mark Twain House and Museum Center, or properly stored.

Project Personnel: The project will be overseen by the museum's Chief Curator Tracy Brindle, who will serve as Project Director. As Chief Curator, Ms. Brindle is responsible for the care and interpretation of the museum's historic campus and collections, and for the content and design of all permanent and special exhibitions. Ms. Brindle has more than eight years of experience in the care of historic collections. Prior to joining the museum in early 2015, she was the Collections and Exhibitions Assistant at the Midway Village Museum in Rockford, Illinois. She holds a bachelor's degree in History; a master's degree in History with a concentration in Public History; and a Certificate in Museum Studies.

The actual conservation treatment will be done by the Williamstown Art Conservation Center in Williamstown, Massachusetts ["WACC"]. WACC is a nonprofit institution for the conservation and preservation of artworks and objects of cultural heritage, which provides consultation and treatment services to museums and other nonprofit organizations, as well as private institutions, businesses, and individuals throughout New England and the Northeast. The museum has worked successfully with WACC in the past, including on the Furniture Conservation Survey referred to earlier. The WACC staff members who will work on the project are Hugh Glover, Conservator of Furniture and Wood Objects, and Department Head; and Christine Puza, Associate Conservator of Furniture and Wood Objects. Mr. Glover conducted the museum's Furniture Survey. He has more than thirty years of experience in the restoration of historic

furniture, and has been with WACC since 1986. Ms. Puza has a Masters of Arts degree in Art Conservation and has worked in the furniture conservation department at WACC, under Mr. Glover's supervision, since January 2013. Prior to joining WACC, she treated wooden objects at other institutions, including the Royal Ontario Museum.

Sequence of Activities: The project will take place over the course of nine months. Project activities will take place in the following sequence:

1. The Chief Curator will finalize all details with the conservators, and pack the items to be conserved for transportation.
2. WACC will transport the artifacts from the museum to its studio.
3. WACC will begin treatment of the objects in accordance with the relevant condition reports for the items. WACC estimates that it will need five months to complete the treatment of the artifacts and prepare treatment reports for each piece. (The project schedule allows more time for the conservators to complete their work than they estimate they will need, in order to allow for any unanticipated delays.)
4. The Chief Curator will be in contact with the conservators throughout the period of treatment to monitor progress and to respond to any issues or questions that may arise.
5. When the treatment of the artifacts is complete, WACC will transport the pieces from its studio to the museum.
6. The crib, rocking chair, and desk will be put on display in the Mark Twain House, and the office chair will be put on display in the Visitor Orientation Exhibition. The glove box will be housed appropriately in an acid-free box and placed in collections storage.
7. Museum staff will update its collections management database and other records to reflect the treatment of the objects, including adding treatment reports and photos.
8. The museum will publicize the completion of the conservation project.

The requested grant will cover the cost of all resources necessary to complete the project.

Throughout the project, museum staff will evaluate its progress through contact with the conservators. It will evaluate the final results of the project by comparing the work done to that outlined in the treatment plans for the objects. The project will be deemed to be a success if the objects have been treated in accordance with the relevant plans and, thus, are in good condition and can be displayed as outlined above for the foreseeable future.

The museum will share the results of the project with the public through its e-newsletter, which it sends to ten thousand people each month, and through its Facebook page, which currently reaches more than forty-four thousand people. The purpose of such publicity will be to educate the public about the need for, and benefits of, historic conservation and preservation; to acknowledge the critical support of IMLS; and to encourage both new and return visitation to the museum.

Project Results

As a result of the project, unique pieces of America's cultural history will be preserved for the benefit of current and future generations; and the general public, scholars and researchers will

The Mark Twain House & Museum

have access to the items both now and indefinitely into the future. In addition, the ability of the museum to interpret the Mark Twain House, a National Historic Landmark, and to tell the story of Samuel Clemens and his family will be enhanced.

The conserved items will also enrich future educational programs that the museum plans to offer to the public, such as decorative arts and design-themed tours and events, and special exhibitions. In the more distant future, the conserved items will contribute to events and publications commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Mark Twain House in 2024.

