



Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-260227-OMS-26
Project Category: Collections Stewardship and Access
Project Type: Large Project (\$25,001-\$75,000)

Wyck Historic House, Garden, and Farm

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$28,126
Amount of cost share:	\$28,126

The Wyck Historic House, Garden, and Farm will address collections stewardship and access for its collection of more than 10,000 family objects from every period of American history. The project will address significant information gaps between its digital collections management software and onsite recordkeeping by creating new and updated digital records, including photographs and complete descriptions, for at least 80% of the collection. In addition to improving digital stewardship, the project will enhance the physical preservation of the collection by rehousing objects as they are photographed and cataloged; installing new interior storm windows to mitigate temperature swings; and adding air purifiers to help control dust and harmful particulates in storage and display spaces. Beneficiaries of this project include researchers, general museum audiences, and the Wyck's staff.

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 most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

Project Justification

Wyck is one of America's most authentic sites with an incredible story and rich collection, but is largely considered a "hidden gem," even by locals. Those that know about the depth and breadth of its collection and resources have a strong appreciation for the stories it tells about nearly 300 years of American history, but not many people outside of the Philadelphia region know about its treasures.

The Wyck Association collection contains objects accumulated by nine generations of the Quaker Wistar-Haines family between 1690 and 1973. The bulk of the collection dates to the fifth, sixth, and seventh generations' periods of ownership, or roughly between 1810 and 1900, but the collection speaks to nearly 300 years of American history. It contains significant pieces associated with early American craft and industry, representative pieces of elite American decorative arts, and important materials related to the history of American horticulture. The accumulated family objects at Wyck are also intimately tied to the Wyck Papers, a set of 100,000 manuscripts that were also left at Wyck and are now stewarded by the American Philosophical Society. Together, the objects and the papers tell a representative story of an elite Quaker family from the nation's founding to the modern era.

Despite the historical, cultural, and artistic significance of Wyck's collection, few truly know the depth of the knowledge available. Significantly, the museum's digital records are sparse. Early curators, working after the museum was established in 1974, instituted a system of paper files stored onsite in filing cabinets. Those original paper files were the museum's sole collections records until 2008, when data was first input into PastPerfect collections management software. Given the size of the collection, priority was placed on simply creating new digital records rather than carefully inputting all existing data into PastPerfect. Subsequent PastPerfect version upgrades proved somewhat sloppy with incomplete or messy data transfers. Ensuing years have also found many incorrect entries, with object numbers and paper records not matching numbers input in the digital database. Staff and volunteers have been slowly working to rectify data transfer and input errors, but that work has been done on an ad hoc basis as time allows. Based on an assessment of paper accession files, Wyck's collection contains roughly 10,000 objects and library materials. Only 4,939 objects and 3,402 library materials have a semi-complete digital record. These 8,341 digital records leave an estimated gap of around 1,659 or more objects and library materials missing digital records. Even the objects that do have digital records are incomplete in meaningful ways. Collections photography is severely lacking, with only 3,250 objects and library materials having digital photographs in the database. In sum, only 39% of object and library records have associated photographs, and only 78% of the collection has any kind of digital catalog record at all. Most records are incomplete, containing no date and location of creation and no description. Nearly of the early collections research performed by early curators lives exclusively in the paper files. Furthermore, this database is not publicly accessible, limiting access to staff, volunteers, or researchers on-site at Wyck. Research visits rely heavily on Wyck's Manager of Interpretation's time and knowledge, rather than allowing visitors and researchers to explore on their own.

Beyond staff recognition of the collections control and knowledge issues, a 2025 Collections Assessment completed by graduate students from the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art

Conservation (WUDPAC) working with the Center for Conservation of Art and Artifacts (CCAHA) identified this as a major area of concern (see Supporting Document 1). In addition to control and access, they also identified other priority issues, including environmental concerns. While the collections materials themselves are maintained as best as possible to the standards set by Wyck's Collections Management Policy and the field-wide standards of the American Alliance of Museums, they are still subject to significant environmental risk. Extreme temperatures due to single pane windows and a lack of central HVAC system, environmental pollutants stemming from the diesel buses that traverse the commercial corridor Wyck resides on, and aging housing that has not been updated in more than 35 years place stress on the collection. Environmental data, tracked on sensors on the second and third floors of the house, identifies extreme fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity in collections spaces across the calendar year, impacting the integrity of the objects stored in those spaces (see Supporting Document 2). Wyck has taken strong steps to mitigate the most extreme changes by initiating an extensive restoration of the exterior of the historic house, but we propose a few additional changes to further protect the collection, including adding interior pop-in storm windows to the eleven windows in collections storage rooms, which will help to control light, temperature, and humidity levels in those spaces and air purifiers to help prevent dust and particulates from landing on objects.

We anticipate three primary groups of audiences and beneficiaries. First, the everyday beneficiaries of this work are Wyck staff, present and future, whose collections management work will be made more efficient and reliable thanks to this concerted effort to upgrade and update our collections database. Second, we anticipate that researchers will greatly benefit from the work, since they will be able to identify objects of note for their own research. Wyck has seen an increase in researcher interest in the collection in recent years, spurred by developing connections to research programs at institutions like the Winterthur Museum, Rutgers University, the American Philosophical Society, and the University of Pennsylvania. At present, studying the collection requires working onsite directly with objects. While local researchers are able to travel onsite without issue, we would like to be able to work with a greater range of national and even international scholars as well. Without reliable photography or digital records, we are unable to send researchers what they need without additional work and background research. With staffing stretched thin, this is not always possible on a regular basis. Better digital recordkeeping and photography are needed to better meet the needs of staff and researchers seeking to work with, learn from, and share the collection.

The third audience and beneficiary is our general museum audience – our Germantown community. We have made great strides in the past five years to create innovative programs and workshops that link our collection to modern artists, craftspeople, and local businesses. Having our collection preserved and more easily accessible will allow visitors who experience a tour or workshop to dive deeper into Wyck's history on their own, without having to rely solely on Wyck's small staff for access. All of this will help make Wyck a more relevant and sustainable historic house museum.

The project will address Inspire Grants for Small Museums Program goal 2, Collections Stewardship and Access, by advancing the management and care of the Wyck collections. While addressing many

elements of the Stewardship and Access goal, the focus is digitization, digital asset management, collections information management.

This grant aligns with many goals of Wyck's strategic plan. Through improving the environment in our collections storage areas and through storm windows, air purifiers, and improved monitoring and rehousing objects in need, we are working towards Goal 1: Preserving Wyck's House and Collections. By digitizing the collection and making it accessible to off-site visitors, we are working towards Goal 2: Maintaining Excellence in Interpretation and Goal 3: Continue to Build Wyck's reputation as one of America's most authentic sites. Through our digitization we look to build new online exhibitions and expand the awareness and use of the collection.

PROJECT WORKPLAN

Collections Digitization- This project will create new and updated collections records, including multi-angle documentary photography, for 80% or more of the Wyck Association collection. Wyck will hire a part-time collections intern to assist with photographing and cataloguing and will rely on volunteers from the museum's Collections Committee to add additional labor for the project. In the fall of 2026, Wyck will write the intern job description, begin the hiring and practical planning processes, create a room-by-room cataloguing and digitization plan, set metadata standards, and purchase the external hard drive to serve as an extra digital backup for the large amount of digital materials that will be created during the project. Fall of 2026 will also see the completion of training on the CatalogIt collections management software for staff and Collections Committee volunteers, which Wyck will be transitioning to prior to the project start date. That software is more suitable for the needs of our collection and offers us the opportunity to develop an accessible and affordable public-facing collections platform. Transferring data to CatalogIt prior to the start of this proposed project minimizes the risk that a future data transfer could compromise the integrity and effort of this project's data entry.

We plan to interview and hire our intern in late fall 2026 and begin requisite training for the project in early 2027. For the first few weeks, the intern will work closely with the Manager of Interpretation, who will train them on the standards set by staff early in the project and how to use the digitization materials, like cameras and light boxes already owned by Wyck. The intern and volunteers will then execute the room-by-room strategy for photographing the collection. At the end of the spring semester, the intern and the Manager of Interpretation will evaluate the project processes and timetable. Summers can be a difficult time to work in the upper floor collections spaces at Wyck due to extreme heat, so emphasis will be placed on database work that can be completed off-site or in the few air-conditioned spaces at Wyck. In the fall of 2027, we will repeat training of the new intern and continue the photography and database work, hopefully streamlined by efficiencies developed the previous semester. We will also continue the scanning and input of paper record data to the online database in fall 2027. By December 2027, we hope to have 80% or more of the collection fully digitized and accessible to researchers.

Climate control and re-housing – Tissue paper and mylar will be ordered in the fall of 2026 so that it will be ready for use as digitization efforts begin in early 2027. As the collection is being photographed, the Manager of Interpretation, Collections Committee, and Intern will pay attention to and note damaged

boxes, aging tissue, or mylar that needs to be replaced. Tissue and mylar will be replaced when objects are returned to their home locations, and damaged storage boxes will be noted for replacement. Silvercloth will also be purchased prior to cataloguing, allowing us to rectify overcrowded silver storage during the photography stage. To improve climate, the interior pop-in storm windows will be measured and placed in late 2026, with installation in 2027. New environmental monitors will be ordered and installed in early 2027 as well.

The most significant risk on this project is that the need for database work will be larger than we imagine, forcing us to limit the scope of the project. While photographing and uploading photos is a significant amount of work on its own, the larger challenge can be rectifying unexpected discrepancies in object numbers or records that were improperly transferred. There is also a risk that there are more un-accessioned and unknown items in storage that we anticipate, again forcing us to limit the scope due to time constraints. To mitigate, Wyck staff will work alongside the Collections Committee, a group of current and former museum professionals, many of whom have been working or volunteering with Wyck's collection for decades. Their institutional knowledge will be invaluable to rectifying disparate records and reconciling differences between paper and digital records. We may still encounter delays due to our ambitious goals, but hope that collectively the knowledge can be preserved and shared. We also hope our planning prior to training the intern will help correct inconsistent data input, like internal location names, which have plagued past attempts at rectifying differences in records and transfers. If we are forced to shorten our scope, we will prioritize photography and digital entry and follow up later with scanning and inputting paper collection records with the assistance of Collections Committee members.

Another inherent risk in the project is that which has limited database work in previous years – staff time not fully allocated towards this work and other, more pressing priorities taking over. We hope to mitigate this by having an intern dedicated specifically to this project, thereby keeping staff focused on the project and less likely to be pulled away with other tasks. Both the ED and the Manager of Interpretation have been at Wyck for a few years and have a better grasp of time constraints and limitations at certain times of the year, informing the planning and timing of the project.

The project will be planned, managed, and implemented by Manager of Interpretation and Executive Director. Wyck's Manager of Interpretation and Engagement will serve as lead project manager under the guidance of the Executive Director. It will be staffed with support from Wyck's Collection's Committee and assisted by an intern pursuing a degree at a Philadelphia-area university in a related area of study.

We intend to accomplish the project over the course of a sixteen-month period between September 2026 and December 2027. We anticipate the project taking up 40% of the Manager of Interpretation's time during this period, a significant investment in completing the project, and 5% of the Executive Director's time. This time will be dedicated to digitizing, database management, and managing the part-time intern that will be hired to assist the project. The project will also require an investment in collections storage and housing, which has sometimes been a low priority for a small historic house

museum. The collection saw large investments in the 1980s and 1990s, but not much in the 2000s. Wyck's Board of Directors recognizes that these investments are necessary to advance the strategic plan and protect Wyck and its collection for the future.

Progress will be tracked by noting the number of objects with updated digital records and digital photography. Environmental improvements will be tracked through accumulated climate data. The data, including temperature, relative humidity, and UV levels, will be closely monitored by staff and compared to previous data.

PROJECT RESULTS

The goal of the project is to preserve and digitize the Wyck collection, with the intention of creating complete digital records for 80% or more of the estimated 10,000 historic objects in the museum. The project will also function as a de facto inventory and condition assessment, enabling staff to gain better intellectual control of the collection. The team will rehouse materials as needed, install interior pop-in storm windows to maintain less dramatic environmental conditions in collections storage areas, install new air purifiers to help clean out urban pollutants, and reinforce environmental management systems and policies. This project will address the ongoing need to better preserve the collection, safeguard the intellectual value of the collection beyond paper records, and allow it to be more widely accessed and studied by visitors and researchers.

We hope the project will inspire a new generation of scholars and community members to find inspiration in the stories found in Wyck's collection. With collections research made easier through digitized collections available online through the CatalogIt software, more opportunities for unique scholarship and discourse on America's rich history will emerge. We also hope it may prompt more volunteers and supporters to become engaged with Wyck, as the historical significance of the collection is made more widely known. Our community connects with Wyck in many different ways, but the majority of our neighborhood audience is unaware of the depth of our historic collection. Creating this public access point and enhancing existing records will offer them more opportunities to use Wyck as a resource to better understand themselves and their place in Germantown history.

This digitization and environmental improvement project will be sustained by future research and investment in the collections. The processes and standards set by the project will continue to inform ongoing collections work, making locating, identifying, and researching objects significantly easier. Environmental improvements will protect the collection long-term and, while not perfect, will provide a more stable climate for the objects and minimize significant temperature swings until a more complete restoration of the house's interior can be completed. Involving members of the Collections Committee throughout the project will also serve to train and educate our engaged volunteers in new collections management policies and practices, enabling the project's legacy to live beyond the tenure of current staff. The overall improvement in environmental control and access to the collection will enable Wyck to advance its strategic plan and inspire more curious souls.

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	Sep-27	Oct-27	Nov-27	Dec-27	
Activity 1: Planning					
Draft Intern Job Description					
Create Digitizing Standards					
Hire Intern					
Activity 2: Digitizing					
Train Intern					
Photograph Collections					
Scan Paper records					
Update catalog records in CatalogIT					
Activity 3: Environmental Upgrades					
Purchase Indows					
Install Indows and HOBOS					
Track & Compare Environmental Data					
Activity 4: Collections Storage Upgrades					
Purchase Supplies					
Rehouse objects					
Activity 5: Ensure longevity					
Train Collections Committee/volunteers in records management					
Assess progress and procedures					
Draft updated recordkeeping policies					
Share results with partner institutions					