



Museums for America

Sample Application MA-259606-OMS-26
Project Category: Collections Stewardship and Access

Chester County History Center

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$25,493
Amount of cost share:	\$26,296

Based on the findings of a previous IMLS award, the Chester County History Center will improve the care and preservation of its collections by conducting a conservation survey of 360 framed works on paper. Museum staff and trained volunteers will edit digital records and create a final inventory of the artworks, the majority of which are portraits of local people and landscapes by local artists in a wide variety of media. The museum will purchase archival supplies and engage conservation consultants, who will conduct the survey onsite with the assistance of museum staff. The conservators will create detailed preservation notes about each object, unframe, and then reframe or rehouse the artworks. The project will result in improved storage conditions, and a final report will provide detailed conservation recommendations that will prioritize future conservation treatment.

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.

NARRATIVE – Conservation Survey – Framed Works of Art on Paper

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

The Chester County History Center (CCHC) requests funding from IMLS in the amount of \$25,492.31 for a conservation survey of approximately 360 framed works of art on paper. This project addresses the IMLS MFA Program Goal 3: Collections Stewardship and Access, Objective 3.2 and is directly connected to the mission and strategic initiatives of CCHC. It specifically relates to properly maintaining this significant collection and making it broadly accessible. This is a priority conservation need in the *CCHC Preservation Plan 2019-2026, Section VIII. Individual Collections, Objective A.1* “Museum collections receive treatment based on conservation priorities. Seek funds for surveys by conservator of specific collections...”. This artwork is significant to the mission and is directly connected to other important artifacts, photographs, and manuscripts in the library, museum, and photo archives. The Conservation Center for Art and Historical Artifacts (CCAHA), Philadelphia, will provide the conservators and technicians to conduct the survey.

The Artifacts – Condition

This group of artifacts has not undergone a conservation survey. Additionally, the numbers have expanded with several recent donations of framed artworks on paper. This sub-collection was identified as a top priority during photography for the recent IMLS Museums for America digitization grant project. The photography required systematically removing framed artworks from storage and reviewing the pieces in a comprehensive manner. The most visibly obvious challenges are acidic window mats and loose wooden or acidic backing boards. The paper is in various states of degradation, such as but not limited to tears, yellowing, foxing, etc. A few have cracked glass. Additionally, cardboard dividers between the works in the vertical storage bins (see attached images) are acidic and vary in size.

The Artifacts – Content

The vast majority of these framed works of art on paper are portraits of local people and local landscapes. Most are also rendered by local artists, both formally trained and self-taught. Chester County is situated in a region with a strong tradition of education in general and art schools in particular that were inspired by the scenery, some of which is now vanishing. Proximity to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA), founded in 1805 in nearby Philadelphia, cannot be overstated. The academy produced individually recognized artists in the region and art instruction well beyond Philadelphia.

The scope of media includes pencil, ink, watercolor, gouache, and pastel drawings, along with hand-colored photographs, cut paper, and a few engraved prints and lithographs. There are a few examples by self-taught individuals, whose personal expression reflects creative spirit and various cultural backgrounds. Other examples document student assignments as school projects. Numerous images were rendered by people with formal training that include but are not limited to: Ada Clendenin Williamson, Bayard Taylor, W.W. Thomson, Robert Weir, Newbold Trotter, Andrew Wyeth, and Barclay Rubincam. The sub-collection of works of art on

paper NOT in frames includes some of these artists and others of note but are outside the scope of this project.

Among the artists are those with a regional, national, or international reputation. Many studied at or were trained by artists associated with the PAFA or at its Country School held from 1916 to 1952 at nearby Historic Yellow Springs. Additionally, the Brandywine School, established by Howard Pyle (1853 – 1911) in Chadds Ford and in Wilmington, DE, influenced illustration nationwide and was made even more famous by the Wyeth family (N.C., Andrew, Jamie) who still live part of the year in Chadds Ford and whose work is a core part of the nearby Brandywine River Museum of Art. N.C. Wyeth moved to the area in the late 1800s and studied with Pyle. These schools, artists, and museums continue the regional artistic legacy. Pyle's studio remains active in nearby Wilmington, multiple generations of Wyeths are artists, and organizations such as the Chester County Art Association, provide instruction for all skill levels and embrace broad participation. CCHC is unique in the area because its collection reflects examples from all of these influences and, as a result, is an active partner in exhibitions, loans, programs, and other collaborations with regional museums and beyond.

Highlights among the works of artists with less formal training are 1700s and early 1800s *fraktur* (taufschein – birth certificates, 4) that reflect the German-speaking colonists from the Palatinate who settled in northern Chester County starting in the early 1700s. They were hand-drawn or pre-printed and hand-colored certificates. They are significant historical and artistic artifacts that reflect a segment of the county's population that is less represented in the museum than other cultural groups.

Watercolors by Westtown School students is another unique group (8). Founded in 1799, this day and boarding school is the oldest continuously operating Quaker school in the U.S. Practicality and simplicity were central to its mission. Student artwork typically represented the school buildings or maps of campus.

Other early 1800s pieces are silhouettes (78) of local people, many identified. Such biographical information is not unusual for Chester County residents, particularly Quakers who still recognize and document people as individuals. The source for many, as indicated by an embossed "MUSEUM", was Charles Willson Peale's (1741 – 1827) Philadelphia Museum (a 40-minute drive by car today). Local people took advantage of the physiognotrace (an instrument designed to trace a person's face), an attraction at the museum that was new technology at the time. In that same era, painted miniature portraits on ivory (6) were popular among those who could afford them. Although not paper, CCAHA staff indicated that these would be appropriate to include. A notable example of an ivory miniature portrait is that of Mary Agnew Taylor (1827 – 1850). When she died, her husband Bayard Taylor (1825 – 1878) wrote a letter to his father-in-law indicating that he was taking her daguerreotype to Cushman in Philadelphia, the most skilled miniature artist. CCHC also owns the letter and the daguerreotype. Bayard Taylor, of Kennett Square, was a well-known author and, while on extensive travels, rendered watercolor landscapes and details of nature (15) that are included in this survey.

Campbell Weir (1901 – 1982), who lived in Marshallton, bequeathed works (5) by his great-grandfather Robert Weir (1803 – 1899) of the Hudson River School and great-uncle J. Alden Weir (1852-1919). They depict topics relevant to the American art of their eras. Perhaps most well-known among these pieces, particularly in Chester County, is Andrew Wyeth (1917 – 2009), whose watercolor *Marshallton* is included in this survey. Other 20th-century artists include Ada Clendenin Williamson (1880 – 1958) of West Chester, whose sphere was portraiture and illustration (6). Less well-known is Wilmer Worthington (W.W.) Thomson (1842 – 1924), whose watercolor landscapes capture the local landscape in delicate detail. He was born in Willistown Twp. and was editor of *The Daily Local News* in West Chester (12). Pastels (14) of local landscapes predominate among works by Unionville artist Barclay Rubincam (1920 – 1978) in this media. Some are final works and others are studies for larger pieces. Impressionistic pastels by Albert Van Nesse Greene (1887 – 1971), who worked in Chester Springs, are also included in this survey (9). Pen and ink drawings (80) by Henry T. MacNeill (1890 – 1970) depict numerous historic structures throughout the county. His work initially predated the local historic and land preservation movement that burgeoned in the 1960s but then became useful visual references for the preservation of the built environment.

Prints are wide ranging in topic in several media. Most of the photographic prints at CCHC are maintained in the Photo Archives and are not framed. However, large-scale portraits still framed are housed in museum storage (10) and are included in this survey. These are black and white prints from the 1800s that are hand-colored with crayon or other materials. Lithographs and engravings (30), ranging in date from the late 1700s to late 1800s, depict general historical subjects that include reproductions of paintings by the locally born Benjamin West (1738 – 1820) and other artists. Some prints also reflect ideal daily life, promote social beliefs, or pinpoint moments of American history, such as military battles or people who have a direct connection to the county or the region.

Audience and Beneficiaries

The audiences and beneficiaries generally overlap. They are broad and inclusive. This project focuses on a significant sub-group of artifacts within the context of fine arts in the museum collection. The body of materials in its entirety includes art on canvas and sculpture. The works of art on paper are a substantial part of the narrative about art in the region from perspectives of aesthetics, documentation, personal and community identity, and cultural practices.

Scholars from international and regional institutions study these materials for use in publications or exhibitions about Chester County artists or the ways in which local and regional art, and its instruction, influenced or were influenced by art movements across Pennsylvania and the U.S. These materials enrich the work researchers undertake in CCHC's library manuscripts, and historic photographs, along with the public records at the Chester County Archives, with which CCHC has a contractual relationship. Additionally, serious and casual artists continue to maintain an active art tradition in this area using works at CCHC and nearby museums as part of their inspiration. A large segment of this collection is notable for its value to genealogical research. It is not unusual to discover that identified images of people, particularly women and children in the 1800s, may be the only existing record of their existence.

CCHC members and other visitors will also benefit from the preservation efforts. In addition to the genealogical researchers, students at local universities may use these works as part of research or other projects. National History Day contestants (high school and middle school) may do the same. CCHC will use these artworks in future physical and digital exhibitions. They will also be featured in social media posts and used for publicity for programming, membership recruitment, events, and other outreach.

Institutional Mission / Conservation Practices

This request is part of the ongoing support by CCHC leadership for conservation. Stewardship of material culture is a priority. The museum completed a General Conservation Survey (GCS) in 1990 by Virginia Naudé. In 2004 all permanent collections (library, museum, photo archives) were combined into one Preservation Plan (2004-2007) developed through the CCAHA. That plan was updated (2011-2018) as was the current Preservation Plan (2019-2026). It integrates physical and digital preservation needs. (An excerpt is attached.)

Artifact surveys encompassed: a portion of furniture (1987), a selected group of paintings (1988), quilts by Nancy Papay (1986), selected clothing by the Textile Conservation Workshop (1989), and Quaker clothing by Helene Von Rosenstiel (1990). In 1990 Papay conducted a General Textile Conservation Survey of flat textiles. Betty Fiske (1993/94) completed a Detailed Condition Survey of works of art on paper (not framed), funded by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. IMLS-funded surveys include: trade signs and commercial stencils by Kory Berrett (2001); flags and banners by Fonda Thomsen and Nancy Pollack (2002); paper toys and dolls by Susan Duhl (2005); and a full paintings (on canvas) survey by Mark Bockrath (2008).

CCHC received NEH Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions: an Emergency Preparedness Plan (2006) advised by Barbara Roberts; Colleen Callahan and Newbie Richardson assessed the clothing and clothing accessory collection (2008); Kory Berrett surveyed the 3-dimensional toy collection (2009); shelving purchased for a new storage area (2010); UV light filters purchased for galleries and storage areas along with a light meter (2011); and Linda Lennon surveyed ferrous metals (2015).

Conservation treatment examples include: an IMLS-funded 2007 treatment by Textile Preservation Associates and Nancy Pollack of a rare 1840s Sons of Temperance banner from a local chapter, signed by a regional sign painter (priority in an IMLS-funded 2002 survey); surface cleaning of paintings and frame repair related to local Arctic explorers in 2010 by Mark Bockrath; stabilized painted trade signs by Kory Berrett in 2011 with IMLS funding (priority in IMLS 2001 survey); a 2016 treatment by Headley Conservation Services of a slant-front desk signed by Joel Bayley in 1747, one of the earliest pieces of Delaware Valley furniture in the museum collection; and an IMLS-funded treatment of 6 priority paintings by Mark Bockrath in 2020. Four pieces of furniture, one sampler, and one painting were also treated by Mark Anderson, Joy Gardiner and Mary McGinn while on loan to the Winterthur Museum for exhibition in 2011.

PROJECT WORK PLAN

Personnel

The project director is **Ellen Endslow**, Director of Collections/Curator. She has an MA in Historical Administration from Eastern Illinois University. Endslow has been at CCHS since 1999. She will work with the CCAHA team and will supervise the trained museum volunteers, who have numerous years of collections management experience. This CCHC team will also add or expand artist biographies in the database. Endslow will spearhead the publicity throughout the project and upon completion. In her role at CCHC, she oversees the museum, library, and photo archives and is primarily responsible for the museum. She has more than 30 years of curatorial and collections management experience, including projects funded by IMLS Conservation Project Support Grants and Museums for America grants, and NEH Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions. She is a member of the American Alliance of Museums (served on CurCom and the Professional Network Council), American Association for State and Local History (serving on Ethics Committee), Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums, PA Museums (serve as Board Secretary), and the Museum Council of Greater Philadelphia.

The **CCAHA** was founded in 1977 in Philadelphia as a non-profit organization created to deliver a wide range of conservation and preservation services. In addition to preservation workshops for smaller institutions, they provide treatment for, primarily, paper-based collections. **Heather Hendry**, Senior Paper Conservator will lead their team for this project. She earned an M.A.C. from Queen's University, specializing in paper conservation (2000), and has 23 years of conservation experience. **Joanna Hurd**, Associate Paper & Photograph Conservator, earned an M.S., Conservation Science, Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (2020). **Chloe Houseman**, Paper Conservator, earned an M.F.A. in Art Conservation, Queen's University (2017). **Josh Rickards**, Manager of Housing and Framing, will oversee the housing and framing work.

Schedule

The schedule was developed in collaboration with CCAHA to ensure that time and resources are managed in a realistic manner that allows the work to be handled carefully amidst a variety of other projects.

September – October

The CCHC Director of Collections will contact CCAHA staff in September to plan the onsite visit. She will work with museum volunteers to update the records in the PastPerfect database to finalize the object survey list. This will include consistency of information in subject and authority fields, and updated descriptions and photodocumentation where necessary. She will forward the list to CCAHA by the end of October. CCAHA will then prepare the Microsoft Access database to record conditions and recommendations for each object. The Director of Collections will also work with CCAHA technicians to order appropriate rehousing supplies. This includes archival foam core boards, used as dividers for vertical storage, and archival mat board to replace inappropriate backing boards. Window mats will be considered on a case-by-case basis. CCHC has a professional grade mat cutter, and dedicated workspace for it, if this step is appropriate. CCHC will also make available archival materials leftover from other projects or will use its budget to purchase needed materials.

CCHC Dir of Coll – 165 hrs; Museum Volunteers – 150 hrs

November 2026 – April 2027

The Director of Collections and museum volunteers will complete research about artists' biographies, landscape locations, and portrait sitters' details for the online database.

Dir of Coll – 20 hrs; Museum Volunteers (4) – 60 hrs

January - February

CCAHA will carry out 4 days of onsite work in January or February. They are dedicating two conservators and two technicians per day to work on this project, based on the size of the collection. This team will work in the curatorial workroom on 2 consecutive days, 2 weeks in a row. This arrangement permits both CCAHA and CCHC to integrate the work realistically into other projects and still focus on completion. The conservators will use the Access database to record the condition, potential treatments, and the priority need for each object. The technicians are purposely included to carry out remedial steps for improved care. They will remove the works of art from the frames and then reframe where appropriate. The conservators may recommend that the technicians do not reframe some pieces. In these instances, CCHC has available archival flat storage (expanded by an NEH grant) for pieces that need to remain unframed for the medium term, as well as storage for the original frames until the frame and artwork can be reunited where appropriate. The Director of Collections and museum volunteers will work with the CCAHA team by moving works of art from storage to the workspace, confirming contextual details from the documentation files if needed, cutting storage divider boards, and replacing framed works of art into the storage spaces. They may also be supervised to create folders for artwork not being reframed, to save CCAHA time. The Director of Collections will create social media in progress.

CCAHA (4) - 4 days; CCHC Dir of Coll – 45 hrs; Museum Volunteers (2-3) – 75 hrs

April – May

CCAHA will provide the final report and summary. The Director of Collections will back-up the survey results on the CCHC cloud space, server, and two existing external hard drives. Museum volunteers will cut-and-paste the digital survey information into the PastPerfect object records as an externally supported back-up and to provide institutional access to the results for priority conservation needs. The survey, with cross references, will be added to existing operational conservation files. The Director of Collections will complete social media posts, reports to the Collections Committee and Board, and add top priorities to the conservation needs list.

CCAHA – 1 day; CCHC Dir of Coll – 40 hrs; Museum Volunteers (2-3) - 36 hrs

Budget

The budget is based on estimated costs by CCAHA after review of the preliminary inventory list of artwork. This reflects an efficient approach to systematically assessing hundreds of artifacts carefully while factoring the multiple projects that CCAHA needs to complete simultaneously. The budget also includes the CCAHA travel between Philadelphia and West Chester. CCHC has calculated the staff and financial resources that it can realistically devote to this project. Museum volunteers are a standard part of CCHC's collections management activities. They are familiar with handling artifacts and working with the database. Workspace is available for this

purpose and its use will not interrupt other collections management activities. There is no impact on public operations. Archival supplies are based on standard materials that are anticipated for rehousing needs. Any changes that could increase the budget will be absorbed by CCHC.

PROJECT RESULTS

The benefits of this project will be: 1) detailed conservation needs for framed works of art on paper that will prioritize future conservation treatment; 2) improved storage space; 3) improved intellectual access to this sub-group on the PastPerfect online database; 4) a significant step in the continued institutional support of a systematic conservation assessment; 5) on-going Board education through project updates about collections stewardship; and 6) the opportunity to maximize the interpretive value of local and regional artists' renderings as windows of discovery into the visual documentation of the area and its people.

During the project, CCHC will post periodic updates on social media, with an emphasis at the outset about artifact condition and the purpose of stewardship. This activity is also part of the on-going reporting to the Collections Committee, a Board Standing Committee that oversees Collections Department activities. The reports, object-level condition descriptions, and treatment recommendations will guide future conservation treatments.

Publicity will be distributed to broad audiences through social media. Still images and videography will illustrate the site visits for viewers to learn about how and why preservation is important. It will demonstrate the time and effort that it requires. Additionally, the records of the entire group will be available online via PastPerfect. This has already proven to be a useful resource for genealogists and other researchers. The work by the CCAHA team will enable the works of art to be included in future exhibitions and made available for loan to other museums that comply with CCHC loan policies. Outgoing loan requirements include but are not limited to providing a Facilities Report that CCHC scrutinizes to meet appropriate conservation and security standards.

Sustained Ongoing Preservation

When not on public view, the works of art on paper will be housed in museum storage with other framed artwork in adjacent shelving that has already been updated. The entire two-building CCHC complex, including museum storage areas, have HVAC climate control that is monitored remotely by the local HVAC vendor and onsite by CCHC staff. HOBO data loggers located in museum and library storage areas provide hourly updates about temperature and relative humidity. In addition, the facility has fire suppression and security systems. In the gallery, security cameras and motion-activated lighting help to protect objects. The LSI gallery track lighting now has LED bulbs that also have UV filters.

Schedule of Completion
Chester County History Center, West Chester, PA

Year 1 – September 1, 2026 – May 31, 2027

	Sept - Oct	Nov - Dec	Jan 2027	Feb	March	April	May
Dir of Coll contacts CCAHA to schedule site visit and finalize storage supplies; reviews and edits survey list							
Museum vols edit PastPerfect records; project publicized through social media							
Dir of Coll provides final survey inventory list to CCAHA; CCAHA creates Access database for condition/treatment reporting							
Dir of Coll orders storage rehousing supplies							
CCAHA site visit assisted by Dir of Coll and Museum Volunteers							
Dir of Coll and Museum Volunteers complete artist biographies							
CCAHA submits final report							
Museum Vols and Dir of Coll integrate item-level details into PastPerfect records to centralize access to info; Dir of Coll maintains and back-up Access database of survey and report							
Dir of Coll will add info to quarterly Coll Dept report to the Board, update progress at quarterly Collections Committee meetings; create social media posts							