



Museums for America

Sample Application MA-249014-OMS-21
Project Category: Collections Stewardship

Mark Twain House and Museum

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$5,000
Amount of cost share:	\$5,320

The project description can be viewed in the IMLS Awarded Grants Search:
<https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/ma-249014-oms-21>

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

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

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

I. Project Justification

The Mark Twain House & Museum seeks funding for the professional conservation treatment of seven 19th-century objects from its collections: four pieces of furniture and three personal items that belonged to Samuel Clemens (more popularly known by his pen name “Mark Twain”) and his wife Olivia. Each of the objects to be conserved provides valuable and unique insight into Twain’s life and his era. Thus, they significantly support the museum’s mission to preserve and continue 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 make them accessible to the public and available for scholarly research.

The museum was founded to preserve Mark Twain’s Hartford, Connecticut home. The home was designed and built for Twain, 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*. Twain 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.”

The Mark Twain House provides valuable insight into the life and times of Mark Twain, 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, and the only one that has been fully restored. The interior of the House has been carefully restored to its condition in 1881, after the Tiffany decoration. In recognition of its national significance, the Mark Twain House has been designated a National Historic Landmark.

In addition to the landmark Mark Twain House, the museum is the steward of a collection of more than twenty thousand artifacts of historic significance. These include: period furnishings; items of decorative and fine arts; domestic artifacts; documents, including correspondence; photographs; films; and books. Many of these items belonged to Mark Twain or to members of his family, such as the items that are the subject of this application.

The Mark Twain House has been operated as a public museum since 1974. In a typical year, the museum serves more than seventy thousand people of all ages who tour the Mark Twain House, visit the museum’s permanent and special exhibitions in its Museum Center, and attend its many public programs.

The Historic Items to be Conserved. Through this project, the museum will have the following objects from its collections professionally conserved to address condition issues:

- Three upholstered chairs, circa 1870, that the Twain family used in the drawing room of their Hartford home – where they remain on prominent display today. The chairs are of ebonized walnut decorated with gilt, finials, and painted porcelain medallions framed in

ormolu. The chairs are believed to be the work of furniture-maker and decorator Leon Marcotte, from whom Twain is known to have purchased furniture and who also created some decorative wood detailing in Twain's home. One of the chairs is missing one of its decorative medallions; another is missing a drop finial and has a loose medallion; and all require cleaning and waxing of the wood. The chairs are a dominant feature of the drawing room and their missing pieces are very noticeable – in fact, they have been commented on by visitors touring the House.

- A 19th-century Italian bench chest that the family used in their Hartford home, and that Twain's only surviving daughter, Clara, kept after his death and used in her own home. The chest, which is on display in the Mark Twain House, is made of veneer and incised wood and is ornately decorated with images of fantastic creatures and flowers. In 1878, the family traveled to Europe, where they purchased many furnishings for their Hartford home. Among their acquisitions was a chest purchased in Venice, which could be this one. The bench has areas of veneer loss, as well as a missing section of molding.
- A circa 1880 leather-clad, velvet and satin-lined case for a carved meerschaum pipe that belonged to Twain. The case bears the logo of the firm that sold the pipe – Carl Hiess, of Graben Street, in Vienna, Austria. Twain was a constant smoker (as he said at his 70th birthday celebration: *it has always been my rule never to smoke when asleep and never to refrain when awake.*) This pipe was likely acquired by Twain on his extensive travels. He gave the pipe and its case to his longtime business agent and friend Franklin Whitmore of Hartford, whose family later returned them to the museum. The leather along the edges of the case is lifting and is missing along one side, and areas are worn.
- A sterling silver and tortoiseshell hair comb that belonged to Twain's wife Olivia. The piece was made by Tiffany and Co., the famed New York City jewelers founded by Louis Comfort Tiffany's father, and bears a Tiffany mark. Twain's daughter Clara kept the hair comb after her mother's death. Two of the comb's tortoiseshell teeth have broken off and need to be re-attached. There also is some corrosion and tarnish on the piece that need to be addressed.
- An ebonized wood walking stick with an ivory handle carved in the shape of a dog's head. The walking stick was given by Twain to Daniel Molloy, an Irish immigrant who was Twain's gardener. Molloy treasured the gift, and a newspaper profile of him in his later years noted that he kept it in a wooden box which he made especially for it. After his death, his son, Judge Thomas Molloy, gifted the stick to the museum. The stick is broken in two pieces, one of the dog's crystal eyes is missing, and the brass tip and the metal collar between the handgrip and stick are slightly corroded.

The Need for the Project. The objects were chosen for this project because of their provenance, their importance to the interpretation of the Mark Twain House and to the study of Mark Twain and his era, and their current condition. All are more than a century old and are in need of repair. In order to preserve them so their future accessibility will be ensured, it is necessary to have them treated by a professional conservator. In 2019, the museum had the objects examined by Christine Puza, a conservator at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center, of Williamstown,

Massachusetts, the firm which the museum plans to engage to treat the items. For each object, she prepared a summary of its current condition, as well as a recommended conservation treatment plan. (These reports are included with this application.)

The museum has been having collection items conserved, in accordance with the findings of professional 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 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 Twain 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. All of the items included in this project have a direct connection to the house and to the family's life during that period. 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 Twain's era. In addition, they are items that are either on daily display to visitors or likely to be featured in public exhibitions, and the museum, with the requested grant, will be able to afford the recommended treatment for each.

The Benefits of the Project. The project will ensure the continued accessibility of the objects for public display and study. In a typical year, more than seventy thousand people from across the country and around the world tour the Mark Twain House and its exhibitions and attend the museum's many public programs. 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 items will support the historic interpretation of the Twain home, and provide the museum's visitors with an accurate representation of life in the household and of the individuals who lived and worked there. In addition, the objects illustrate late nineteenth-century trends in furniture, décor, and accessories, and illuminate the evolution of Samuel Clemens from a poor boy of the south to an upper-class "Connecticut Yankee." The fact that all of the objects were personal belongings of Twain and his wife adds to their interpretive value, as they provide authenticity, and visitors are particularly interested in - and affected by - items with a direct link to Twain. In fact, in evaluations of recent special exhibitions, many visitors stated that the opportunity to see actual family belongings was what they liked best about the exhibitions.

The furniture items will be returned to public display in the Mark Twain House. The comb, walking stick, and pipe case initially will be put in collection storage. However, shortly after completion of the project, the museum plans to display the items in a small exhibit about object conservation. They will then be available for use in other displays and special exhibitions, as well as to enhance public programs such as lectures. For example, before it broke, the comb was displayed at a program on Tiffany jewelry, as well as in an award-winning costume exhibition; and the pipe case was included in a special exhibition about Twain's travels. If it had been in better condition, the museum would have featured the walking stick in a special exhibition about the individuals who worked as servants in the Twain household. The objects also will be available for loans to other cultural organizations for exhibitions.

All of the museum's collections, including the objects to be assessed, are available to researchers. They have been studied by scholars conducting research into Mark Twain, various aspects of the 19th century, or the work of particular artists, artisans, or furniture makers represented in the collections. Noted Twain scholars and biographers who have utilized the museum's collections include Jocelyn Chadwick, Ron Chernow, Kerry Driscoll, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Alan Gribben, Susan Harris, Ron Powers, and Thomas Quirk. The collections have also been used by journalists and by other institutions. In addition, the collections have been featured in documentaries and television shows about Mark Twain and/or his era, including Ken Burns' *Mark Twain*, C-SPAN's *Book TV* and *American History TV*, the PBS series *Pride of Place*, A&E Channel's *America's Castles*, and HGTV's *Restore America*; and have been included in numerous books and other publications.

Advancement of Museum's Strategic Plan. The project will advance the museum's Strategic Plan, one of the guiding principles of which is: "As a museum, we strive to preserve our historic house and collections according to the highest industry-recognized standards." The Plan also calls for the museum to seek ways to use the collections to reinforce its mission of promoting Mark Twain's legacy and relevance, and to integrate the collections further with the visitor experience. This is to be done by making more of the collections accessible to the general public through exhibitions and other displays and in connection with public programs. Thus, the project, by preserving important collection items so that they will be available for future use, advances the Plan's objectives.

Alignment with Museums for America Goals. By preserving these valuable and unique artifacts, the project will ensure that they remain available to both the general public through display at the museum and at other public sites, and to scholars and others for research. This increases public access to these historic assets. In addition, by enhancing the information conveyed through exhibitions and other public programs, the objects will support lifelong learning.

II. Project Work Plan

The project is at a mature level and benefits from the museum's extensive experience in conducting similar conservation projects, as well as the expertise and best practices of the conservators who will treat the objects. The project work plan is relatively simple. The museum's staff will finalize the project schedule with the conservators, including scheduling the transportation of the objects 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, either put the objects on display in the Mark Twain House or store them in accordance with relevant preservation standards. The museum will monitor the environmental conditions, including temperature, humidity, and light, in the Mark Twain House and in other display and storage areas where the objects will be kept.

Risks. The most significant risk to the successful completion of the project concerns timing. In connection with past conservation projects, the museum has encountered instances where, due to unforeseen circumstances, conservators have not been able to get their work done in accordance with the agreed-upon schedule. Although the museum does not anticipate any delays, it has

included extra time in the project timeline for the conservation treatment, beyond that requested by the conservators.

It is not expected that the current pandemic will impact the museum's ability to complete the project during the project period. The museum has been able to continue to properly care for its collections and to successfully carry out other conservation projects during the pandemic.

Project Personnel. The project will be overseen by the museum's Director of Collections Jodi DeBruyne, who will serve as Project Director. Ms. DeBruyne assumed her present position in January 2020. Prior to joining the museum, she was Director of Collections at the Abbe Museum in Maine, and the Curator of Collections and Exhibits for the Juneau-Douglas City Museum in Alaska. She holds a bachelor's degree in Art History and a master's degree in Museum Studies, and has experience overseeing similar grant-funded projects. She will be assisted by the museum's Assistant Curator Mallory Howard, who has assisted with the care and interpretation of the museum's historic buildings and collections since 2010. Ms. Howard holds a bachelor's degree in History, and certification from the Modern Archives Institute of Washington, DC.

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 used WACC's services in the past for the treatment of important collection objects, and has been pleased with their work.

The WACC staff members who will work on the project are Christine Puza, Department Head of Furniture, Frames, and Analytical Services, and Helene Gillette-Woodard, Department Head of Objects. They may be assisted by Sally Gunhee Kim, Post-Graduate Fellow in Objects and Furniture Conservation. Ms. Puza conducted the assessment of the objects last year. She has been a conservator of wooden objects at WACC for almost eight years; has experience in the examination and treatment of a wide range of fine art and decorative objects, including wood, gilded wood, lacquer, organic, composite, ivory, and metal objects; and has a Master of Arts degree in Art Conservation, a Certificate of Advanced Study in Museum Studies, a Bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences, and a Technical Certificate in Gemology. Prior to joining WACC, she treated objects at other institutions, including the Royal Ontario Museum. Ms. Gillette-Woodard has held her current position for eleven years and prior to that was Senior Conservator of Objects and CEO at Heartland Art Conservation in Indiana. She has a Master of Arts degree in Art Conservation, a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Museum Studies, and a Bachelor's degree in Ecology and Chemistry. Ms. Kim works under the supervision of Ms. Puza and Ms. Gillette-Woodard. She has a Masters of Art degree in Art Conservation and a Bachelor's degree in Chemistry and Visual Arts, and has been a graduate art conservation intern at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia and at the McCord Museum in Montreal.

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

1. The Project Director will finalize all details with the conservators and, with the assistance of the Assistant Curator, pack the items to be conserved for transportation. She will also provide visitor services staff with necessary information to explain the absence of the drawing room chairs to visitors touring the Mark Twain House.
2. WACC will transport the objects to its studio in accordance with appropriate professional standards, and will begin treatment of them in accordance with the relevant condition reports for each. WACC estimates that it will need six months to complete the treatment of the objects. (The project schedule allows for an additional two months for the conservators to complete their work, in order to allow for any unanticipated delays.)
3. The Project Director 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.
4. When the treatment of the objects is complete, WACC will transport them back to the museum.
5. The chairs and bench chest will be put on display in the Mark Twain House. The pipe case, walking stick, and comb will be placed in collections storage until needed for a display or exhibition.
6. Museum staff will update its collections management database and other records to reflect the treatment of the objects, including adding treatment reports and photos.
7. The museum will publicize the completion of the conservation project.

Resources. The resources needed to conduct the project are staff time, the contracted services of the conservators, and the funding needed to complete the project. The Project Director and the Assistant Curator will conduct all required project activities as part of their regular duties. WACC has confirmed its availability to undertake the project. The museum will include the project expenses in its operating budget for the fiscal year in which the project will take place, and will cover its required cost-share from its operating revenue.

Monitoring Project Progress. 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 each object. 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 utilized and displayed as outlined above for the foreseeable future.

Sharing Project Results. The museum will share the results of the project with the public through its e-newsletter, which it sends to more than 14,500 subscribers each month; through its Facebook page, which currently reaches more than 50,000 followers; and through its website, which has more than 278,000 unique visitors annually. 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. In addition, the non-furniture objects will be featured in a future exhibit at the museum about the conservation of historic objects.

III. Project Results

Intended Results & Impact on Collections. The project is addressing the need to have important items in the museum's collections professionally conserved due to their age and current condition, which if not addressed, could limit their future accessibility. As a result of the conservation treatment, the condition of each of the objects will be improved and stabilized, so that it will be accessible for public display and for research purposes for the foreseeable future. The objects to be treated provide unique and valuable insight into the life of Mark Twain, as well as into a number of other themes in American history and culture. The project will ensure that they remain accessible to scholars and others for research, and to the general public through exhibitions, public programs, and other display. Thus, the project will improve both the condition and the utility of the museum's collections.

The museum's publicizing of the project will also benefit the museum's collections because it will serve to educate museum supporters and the community in general about the need for such conservation projects and their positive impact. This will support the museum's efforts to raise funds for future conservation projects.

Data Collection & Tangible Products. During the project period, the only data that will be collected by the museum is the information that will be contained in the reports of the conservators who treat the objects. Such data will be used to assess the project, and will be useful for the on-going care of the objects. Over the long-term, the success of the project can be further demonstrated through data about the use of the conserved items by the museum, by other institutions, and by scholars and other researchers, in the years following their conservation.

The tangible products of the project will be the objects in their improved condition.

Sustaining the Benefits of the Project. The museum will sustain the benefits of the project by properly caring for the conserved objects in order to maintain their improved condition and ensure their continued accessibility into the future. Following the project, the objects either will be exhibited or stored in collections storage. Such exhibition and storage shall comply with applicable preservation standards. Environmental conditions in the exhibition and storage spaces will be monitored; the exhibited furniture will be regularly cleaned in accordance with applicable preservation practices; and the items in storage will be housed using appropriate archival materials.

Schedule of Completion: Conservation of Sam and Olivia Clemens Objects

Activity	2021	2022								
	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June
Project details finalized with conservators at WACC*	—									
Four furniture pieces & three objects are transported to conservation studio by WACC	—									
Conservators treat furniture and objects at WACC studio		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Museum staff maintains contact with conservators to monitor progress of project		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The furniture and objects are transported back to the museum by WACC										—
The chairs (3) and bench chest are put on display in the Mark Twain House; walking stick, pipe case, and hair comb are stored in collections storage										—
Museum staff enter treatment info, photos, and documents into the museum’s collections database and records; project is publicized										—

*WACC: Williamstown Art Conservation Center