

Assignment #3: Creating and Funding Preservation Projects to Enhance Collections Care

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Abstract

Memphis, Tennessee, has been a cultural hub since its founding in the early 19th century, and its history is rich with perseverance, rhythm, and soul. The cultural collection at the Museum of Science and History aims to preserve this history while inspiring the next generation to carry on that legacy. This collection is enjoyed, appreciated, and studied by students across Memphis, from elementary students on their first field trip to middle schoolers using passports and graduates researching objects. Over time, the collection has grown to represent several eras of Memphis' past through photographs, written documents, paintings, and clothing textiles. Several objects apart from permanent displays have shown signs of light damage. This grant will allow the MoSH to conduct necessary assessments of lighting systems and object conservation to prevent further damage to the collection and prevent other objects from deteriorating.

Narrative

A. What Activity (or activities) would the grant support?

The Museum of Science and History (MoSH) has been an iconic staple of Memphis' skyline. Built-in the early 1920s, the 'Pink Palace', a local nickname based on the distinctive pink marble, was sold to the city of Memphis for the use of a museum, and it has been open to the public ever since. The MoSH aims to inspire discovery in the next generation by preserving and interpreting the impact of cultural histories and environmental landscapes on this region. Several collections are housed within the MoSH, both natural and cultural, a planetarium, two historic homes, and a nature center.

Over the last decade, the cultural collection has grown exponentially, allowing for rearranging exhibit spaces to tell new stories about Memphis's cultural history. Most of the cultural exhibits are housed on the upper level of the original mansion, which has been kept as original as possible. These are permanent exhibits, and while the objects are frequently changed, several photographs, paintings, and other textiles have been flagged for fading.

This grant will support two main activities: a general assessment of the cultural collection and an assessment of filtered light fixtures for exhibit spaces. The main concern is upgrading the filtered lighting to prevent further damage to the collection. Local architect Haizlip Studio, specializing in educational centers, will conduct an initial walkthrough and assess the lighting fixtures. Their report will recommend the best lighting solutions for each exhibit space and practices moving forward.

The second activity will focus on a general assessment of the collection and conservation techniques to reverse light damage. Consultant Corinne Dune will conduct the initial evaluation.

The report will offer recommendations on conservation techniques, maintenance, and long-term care of the collection.

B. What are the content and size of the humanities collections that are the focus of the project?

Memphis has been a cultural hub since its founding in the early 1800s. It was involved in the Civil War, the center of the cotton boom, and the birthplace of Blues. Since its founding, the MoSH has focused on the impact these historical events have had on Memphis and the surrounding region and how life evolved through these periods for the people of the mid-south. The cultural collection strives to educate visitors on how Memphis grew throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, facing racial and social injustices and technical marvels of early medicine such as nursing, dentistry, and pharmacy.

The current cultural collection contains approximately 20,000 items:

- Written documents dating from the 19th century, including letters from Confederate soldiers, land and property sales, journals, and racial propaganda.
- Photographs (19th to 21st century) of portraits, prominent figures, local landmarks, and activities.
- Paintings and drawings of local landscapes, architectural buildings, historical events, and portraits.
- Pharmaceutical supplies include medical advertisements, signage, scales, Victorian remedies, and medicines.
- Moving images (1930s—1970s): film of everyday events, jazz and blues performances, home videos, notable figures' speeches, marches, and protests.
- Musical Instruments from various local and prominent musicians, some with signatures and corresponding films or photographs.
- Textiles of Civil War era uniforms, dresses, banners, and flags of Union and Confederate origin.
- Records and audio recordings from local record labels (1950s to 1980s)

C. How are these humanities collections used?

MoSH collections are made for the community and are used primarily in education and research programs.

1. EDUCATION: Memphis public and private schools have struggled over the past several decades with minimal funding, overcrowding, and a lack of accurate educational materials. The MoSH is dedicated to giving students access to learning about their city, local region, natural history, and scientific events. The museum has partnered with the city and local schools in several ways to provide access to these collections:
 - Suitcases & Passports - These are education kits and lesson plans that teachers and librarians can check out for up to two weeks. They are free to use in ANY Tennessee classroom. The suitcases have science and social studies topics and come packaged in rolling trunks with all materials

needed for lesions, displays, and activities. Passports are smaller suitcases with photos, activity cards, and other materials. There are different topics in both passports and suitcases that focus on social studies and sciences. All teaching materials and activities align with Tennessee curriculum standards.

- Field Trips—MoSH offers a variety of trips to all Memphis schools, both public and private. These are at little or low cost to the school and provide students with tours of the exhibits with experienced guides, special planetarium shows, and the opportunity to visit both historic homes under the museum’s care. Coursework, prompts, and activities are provided to teachers for post-trip evaluations and reflections.
 - Summer and School Break Camps—Low-cost day or week-long camps provide elementary students with engaging material and lessons on different topics.
2. Research - Memphis is home to two major Universities, and the MoSH offers student researchers the opportunity to use all collections for research papers and studies at no cost to the student or the university.

D. What is the nature and mission of your institution?

“Inspire discovery through collecting, preserving, and interpreting the cultural histories and natural sciences that shape our region.”

The MoSH has been part of Memphis’ history and is a leader in preserving the integral stories that make up its cultural past. The original building was built by Clarence Saunders, the founder of Piggly Wiggly, but was sold to the city after he declared bankruptcy in the late 1920s. While it began as a simple collection of memorabilia, dolls, taxidermied animals, and other objects, the collection centered around the history of Memphis. The MoSH has grown over the past 90 years, with a significant expansion in 1975, including two historic homes, a nature center, and a planetarium. These collections cover various topics and themes, but all still centralize the story of Memphis and its people. Many objects in all collections were donated by local families or unearthed in archaeological digs by the MoSH in conjunction with local universities.

Discovery is the core of MoSH’s mission: to provide students and local Memphians with the chance to learn about their history and see how Memphis has shaped the world, such as the birthplace of Blues and Rock n’ Roll and a significant site of the Civil Rights movement. The focus on providing underprivileged students and schools with the materials to learn and opportunities to explore outside the classroom walls is what inspiring discovery is all about. Students are the next generation of scientists, historians, and archivists who will continue telling the legacy of Memphis.

The MoSH collections team consists of dedicated individuals who work diligently with volunteers and interns to ensure that the collections are cared for properly while in storage, on exhibit, or loan.

E. Has your institution ever had a preservation or conservation assessment?

MoSH has never had a preservation or conservation assessment. In the past several years, an effort has been made to digitize many photographs, paintings, propaganda, and pharmaceutical advertisements. An archivist was brought in to help build an online database and teach proper training on protecting objects when digitizing them. Condition reports were initially taken when objects were archived, but only a small percentage of the collection has been examined.

F. What is the importance of this project to your institution? Discuss how this project fits into the institution's overall preservation needs or plans (past and future). Describe the current condition of collection.

The cultural collection has been part of MoSH since it opened in the 1930s. Preservation is a core value for the museum and an essential part of the mission. Over the last 90 years, we have worked to grow this collection and preserve the significance of Memphis's history. Through expansions and remodels, the cultural exhibit spaces continue to evolve as the collection does.

While we diligently work to preserve this vast range of cultural artifacts, there is always room for improvement and new techniques to learn. These two assessments will give our team new ways to upgrade the lighting with temporary or permanent fixtures, tricks for providing minimal light exposure and a general conservation report, and learn conservation techniques for caring for light-damaged materials.

At the MoSH, photographs, advertisements, handwritten documents, and textiles comprise our cultural collection. Moving forward, we must understand the best practices for keeping these objects safe while on display, conservation techniques, and lighting tricks that can be implemented in other gallery and exhibition spaces.

G. What are the names and qualifications of the consultant(s) and staff involved in the project?

Project Director: Raka Nandi—Nandi has been the director of exhibits and collections at MoSH since 2021. She has been a staple in the Memphis museum community, having worked in collections at the Stax Museum and the Civil Rights Museum. She earned a B. A in Communications from Mills College and an M.As in History and European studies from George Mason and Washington University, respectively. Nandi has directed several projects at MoSH, such as implementing new archival storage and updating the emergency preparedness plan.

Consultant: Corinne Dune - MoSh will collaborate with Dune for the General Conservation assessment and training. Dune has worked for several museums and libraries, large and small, and has operated her private conservation practice since 2010. She received a Master's in Photograph Conservation at the National Institute of Cultural Heritage in Paris.

Consultant: Haizlip Studio—Founded by Reb Haizlip in 1998, Haizlip Studios works with nonprofit organizations that meld creativity and education to shape experiences and provide community enrichment. Their primary services include master planning, architecture, and exhibit design. They have recently worked with the Wonderscope Children's Museum, Sultana Disaster Museum, and Glazer Children's Museum.

H. What are the plan of work and timetable for the project?

January 2025: MoSH will contact Corinne Dune and Haizlip Studios to schedule consultation walkthroughs and sign agreements.

February 2025: 1. Send copies condition reports of objects noted with light damage to Dune and exhibit space drawings and blueprints to Haizlip Studios for review. 2. Virtual meeting with Haizlip Studios to review the current lighting setups and manufacturers. Schedule a walkthrough meeting with

March-May 2025: 5-day visit with Dune (Add an extra day for travel from Nashville) to assess objects affected, conservation training, and initial conditions report—1-day walkthrough with Haizlip Studios to review lighting adjustments and discuss potential upgrades if needed.

August 2025: Dune will draft and submit a conservation report to MoSH.

September 2025: Dune and MoSH will have a virtual call for the final discussion. MoSH will then submit the final conservation report, necessary reporting, and financial accounting to NEH. The Project is Complete.

Budget

	Computational Details/ Notes	Duration	Total	Project Total
1. Salaries & Wages				
Project Director (Raka Nandi)	Collections and Exhibit Director, 98\$/Day	166 days	\$16,268.00	\$16,268.00
2. Consultant Fees				
Corinne Dune	Conservation Consultant, 150\$/hour	25 days	\$30,000.00	\$46,268.00
Hazlip Studios	Exhibit/ Lighting Consultant, 100\$/hour	14 hours	\$1,400.00	\$47,668.00
3. Travel				
Corinne Dune	5 day stay in Memphis			
	Hotel 279\$/a night	4 nights	\$1,160.00	\$48,828.00
	Meals per diem \$70/a day	5 days	\$350.00	\$49,178.00

	Gas		\$500.00	\$49,678.00
Total Project Costs				\$49,678.00

This project costs \$49,678, most of which accounts for Corinne Dune’s visit and training program on light damage conservation. Since Memphis is only three hours south of Nashville, Dune opted to use her personal vehicle if we paid gas per diem. The option to rent her a vehicle is available should a need arise. Haizlip’s office is in Memphis and does not require travel expenses. Raka is this project's main contact and director; she will handle all communication with the consultants, such as emailing blueprints and condition reports, meetings virtually, and in-person walkthroughs.

Attachments

Corinne Dune—She is an expert in photograph and unbound document conservation and offers services in conservation planning and environmental assessment. Since several photographs and written documents have been flagged for light damage, she is a great fit to assess the damage. Her practice is in Nashville, which is only three hours north of Memphis, allowing easy transportation to the MoSH.

Haizlip Studio - They are a local architecture firm that specializes in non-profits. I called and spoke to them about exhibit assessments. Since we are just looking to assess the lighting systems in gallery and exhibit spaces, they can schedule a quick walk-through and virtual meeting with blueprints to determine if the lighting system needs to be upgraded or can be adjusted vis filters or placements.