

APP-246130-OLS-20 - Twin Lakes Library System

Remembering CSH: A Community Memory Project

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

The Twin Lakes Library System (TLLS) is partnering with Georgia College & State University (GC) to create a community-based oral history of the Central State Hospital (CSH), once the world's largest mental institution. In close collaboration with Milledgeville residents, we will responsibly and sensitively preserve the history of a site of local, national, and international interest. We will engage with this important and heretofore overlooked aspect of our local history by collecting both audio and video recordings of our interviews with former staff, administrators, and patients; conducting community harvest days, during which the community is solicited for digital copies of items related to CSH that they may have within their own personal archives; and, finally, using both the audio-visual content of those interviews and the gatherings of our harvest days to construct educational exhibitions. Our overall goal is to educate the public on mental health care, thereby contributing to efforts to eradicate the stigma still suffered by neurodiverse individuals and people living with mental illnesses.

TLLS has partnered with GC in the past, and our present collaborative vision builds, now, on the success of previous partnerships and each organization's unique capacities. GC understands our community and will act as technical advisers and coaches in oral history recording, interviewing, archiving, and project management. They will train interns and project personnel, increasing Twin Lakes' institutional capacity for developing high-quality products. In addition, GC will take the lead on developing both a digital and a traveling exhibit to help us tell the story of Central State Hospital that TLLS will later help distribute to other libraries and museums in Georgia. TLLS will also convene a local symposium with nationally renowned scholars to provide context and understanding that will further the local appreciation of the history of CHS.

Alignment to IMLS Agency Goals: To **Build Capacity**, we will have training sessions conducted by our partner, the Georgia Disability History Archives, so that our library, partner organizations, and interns have increased technological and preservation knowledge, as well as the capacity to conduct interviews with intentionality and sensitivity towards the subjects and subject matter. We will **Promote Lifelong Learning** opportunities to youth and adults, including physical and digital exhibits, as well as a community symposium. By beginning this project while, subjects are still available for oral history interviews, we are saving vital experiences from an important part of our community for future generations, as well as encouraging our community to view CSH as a vital part of its history, thereby increasing **Public Access**.

Our Community: The Twin Lakes Library System (TLLS) has served the people of Milledgeville and Baldwin County, Georgia since 1938. It has an operational budget of around \$700,000 per year, with

\$530,000 of the budget being local funding. We have 6 full-time staff, complemented by 13 part-time staff and 2 volunteers. All local history and genealogical services are provided by volunteers.

According to the 2018 U.S. Census estimates, the City of Milledgeville has a population of 18,892 while Baldwin County as a whole has an estimated population of 44,823. Being a small city in a rural community, we have struggled economically in recent years. Once heavily dependent upon government and manufacturing jobs, the closing of Central State Hospital as well as several large plants including Rheem, Shaw, and, most recently, Mohawk, have hurt the local economy. Baldwin County as a whole has lagged behind the rest of Georgia and the United States in recovery after the recession, with a poverty rate of 25.2%, according to the most recent U.S. Census estimates.

According to data from a 2015 study commissioned by the local Habitat for Humanity, in Harrisburg (a residential community adjacent to Central State and home to some of its former employees) 40% of residents do not have access to reliable transportation. Additionally, the community has higher levels of poverty and lower levels of education than Baldwin County as a whole.

Central State Hospital accepted its first patient in December of 1842 when it was founded as the Georgia State Lunatic, Idiot, and Epileptic Asylum. It continued operating as the state's main mental hospital, eventually encompassing 200 buildings on a 2000 acre campus. At one time, it was the largest mental hospital in the world, with approximately 12,000 patients.

Why this work is important: Central State Hospital was once the largest mental hospital in the world. Given its size, long history (dating back to 1842), and its significance to our local community, there is a paucity of attention paid to its overall role in our community's history. To our knowledge, there are no oral history interviews related to CSH that are publicly available. Additionally, given that many of the former staff, administrators, health professionals, and patients of CSH are aging, their stories and memories are at risk of being lost forever. Significantly, these memories are from local community members, who can tell a story that is not often told when we speak about our town. By appointing local community members and representatives from former CSH staff and patients to our community advisory board, we hope to engage those populations that will benefit most from this project. We have previously worked with former CSH staff on a digitization project that helped to tell the evolution of nursing at CSH, and we have engaged them during our planning process. Importantly, we also want to give neurodiverse individuals the opportunity to tell their stories, to frame their stories in a context that promotes understanding and compassion, and to encourage our community to explore their connections to CSH. Finally, by involving college students in this project, most of whom hail from different parts of Georgia, we will connect them to the local community and create connections with individuals that they might not have otherwise interacted with.

PROJECT WORK PLAN We will run a 2 year program, drawing inspiration from two existing neurodiverse oral history projects: *Schizophrenia Oral Histories* and *Traverse City State Hospital Oral History Project*, and three IMLS-funded programs oral history programs, including recent APP winner **Benzonia Public Library**, as well as the **Oral History in the Digital Age** and *StoryCorps @ Your Library* projects. Planning of the overall project will be performed by the leadership team of Holly Croft, Stephen Houser, Evan Leavitt, and Jessamyn Swan.

Holly Croft, Ina Dillard Russell Library Digital Archivist in Special Collections, has a background in archival best practices, digital preservation, public history, and exhibit curation. She will be responsible for training and overseeing student workers on this project, as well as ensuring oral histories are adequately preserved for the future.

Stephen Houser is the Director of the Twin Lakes Library System. His focus in the library field is on digital innovation and inclusion, civic engagement, and the role of the public library in a democracy. Most recently, TLLS received a grant through a partnership of the Georgia Public Library Service (GPLS) and the Digital Library of Georgia (DLG) to digitize a record of nurses who studied at the former CSH nursing school. A symposium was presented at a TLLS branch discussing the evolution of nursing practice at CSH. The digitized record has been the most accessed item in the DLG's collection from 9/2018 to the present. He will be responsible for project organization, process creation, and communication, as well as serving as the participant in the community of practice.

Evan Leavitt, Ina Dillard Russell Library Manager of Facilities Operations & Planning, has a diverse background of experience in public history, oral history collection, video editing, graphic design, and exhibit curation. He will be able to pair these skills with his lifelong knowledge of Milledgeville and the diverse perceptions of Central State Hospital within the community's consciousness to assist in oral history training and in producing the project's associated exhibit elements.

Jessamyn Swan, Ina Dillard Russell Library's Community Engagement Archivist, specializes in outreach to communities, particularly to those traditionally marginalized by society and therefore underrepresented in archives. She has a B.A. in Psychology and has taken 36 credit hours of nursing courses, 5 credits of which were devoted specifically to administering care to neurodiverse patients ("Psychiatric Nursing for the Mental Health Client"). Her coursework included approximately 170 hands-on clinical hours in the adult ward at Mesilla Valley Hospital in Las Cruces, New Mexico. She is also an award-winning writer with an M.A. in English. Given her past experience, education, and her current professional specialization, she is well equipped to perform and process oral history interviews, provide consultation on sensitively dealing with neurodiverse populations, supervise interns, co-author exhibit narrative elements with Mr. Leavitt and contribute project design elements that engage the broader Milledgeville community.

Time Frame: Our work will be divided into four phases, from September 2020 - August 2022.

Phase One (September 2020 - November 2020):

During this phase, we will focus on building our capacity. We will begin by hiring and training (with the assistance of our partners) oral history interns (with a special focus on conducting oral history interviews with neurodiverse individuals). We will acquire the technology necessary for conducting the interviews and for our community harvest days and form a community advisory board to assist us with developing a community knowledge base of CSH history and identifying oral history interview candidates.

Phase Two (December 2020 - December 2021):

During this phase, we will focus on collecting community memory around CSH. We will conduct approximately 40 interviews with former CSH staff, nurses, doctors, administrators, and patients. We will be concurrently collecting any related physical materials or records that are in community possession (photographs, videos, etc.). Transcription and metadata creation will also occur during this phase.

“Community Harvest days” are days on which we will set up booths at community events and serve community members who wish to donate electronic copies of materials related to Central State Hospital. During the course of our project, we will participate in 10 community events. To ensure that community members interested in contributing their voice to our project are easily able to locate us on one of our Harvest Days, we will implement an outreach plan with several components, including local media interviews, flyers and posters, word of mouth, and social media. Items that community members bring to our booth will be scanned with flatbed scanners. 600 dpi Tiff images will be retained by the archive, and 300 dpi PNG images will be scanned and given to participants on a flash drive. The original materials will then be returned to participants. Two of the four staff who attend these events will be employed in scanning items for community members. Interviews will be conducted by two of the four staff attending these events, with one staff member monitoring the audio equipment and the other staff member conducting the actual interview.

Phase Three (January 2022 - April 2022):

During this phase, we will focus on preparing our collected material for dissemination and exhibition. Interviews will be ingested into the Digital Library of Georgia, a Digital Public Library of America hub. We will acquire display materials for our traveling exhibit, create the content for that exhibit, and simultaneously create a digital version of the physical exhibit. We will work with our local public radio affiliate to create a documentary feature on CSH, with the possibility it may be distributed state or nationwide. We will also begin planning our culminating symposium on CSH history, to occur in May 2022.

Phase Four (May 2022 - August 2022):

During this phase, we will promote and celebrate our community's shared history. We open our physical exhibit, launch our digital exhibit, and promote both within the community. To close our project, we will hold a one-day-long, informal, community-centered symposium in May 2022 (Mental Health Awareness Month). A keynote speaker with some scholarly background related to Central State will be selected, and we will pull themes generated by interviewees during the recording of the oral histories to structure the sessions. In roundtables with other community members, those who contributed oral histories will be invited to discuss what they contributed and why it is important.

Resources Required & Adequate Budget:

We anticipate 150 hours for each of the leadership team members to carry out this project. We have budgeted for 150 hours for each of the interns of the two year period of training, interviews, and metadata creation. Project personnel and the creation of the exhibit form the largest part of our budget, but as labor costs are low and we have three institutions of higher learning in our community, we expect to be able to maximize the value of our labor costs. The creation of a traveling and digital exhibit will be important to tell the story of CSH, and ingesting the oral history interviews into the Digital Library of Georgia's collection will help ensure both their permanence and also their access.

PROJECT OUTCOMES:

To measure our goal of building local capacity, all team members will track and measure the community harvest day output and attendance. We will measure the increase in archival equipment available for the public, and will document the planned lifespan of this equipment. Indicators of success will be 10 completed community harvest days, at least 10 community members at each day who contributed material, and a doubling of the archival equipment available for public use in our community.

To measure our goal of expanding lifelong learning in our community, all team members will track the participation of community members in the physical exhibits and symposium, digital exhibit views, and community advisory board meetings. Community Engagement and Internship Coordinator Swan will record the number of interns successfully trained in conducting oral history interviews. Primary Contact Houser and Project Director Croft will conduct exit interviews and portfolio reviews with each intern to evaluate project outcomes with the needs articulated in the Project Work Plan. Indicators of success will be the training of at least 5 interns, attendance of at least 100 individuals in the symposium, 250 visitors to the physical exhibit, and 1500 views within the first year of the digital exhibit opening. Attendance at the community board meetings should average at least 8 community members per meeting.

To measure our goals of increasing community memory, providing context to these memories, and giving voice to marginalized groups, Primary Contact Houser will work with Community Engagement and Internship Coordinator Swan, Exhibit Creator Leavitt, Project Director Croft, and the community advisory board to develop lists of potential interviewees and schedule oral history interviews with them. The team will keep track of how many interviews are recorded. Additionally, progress will be measured against video production goals: at least 15 minutes of highly-edited video content for the interactive exhibits and full interviews posted to the Georgia College Special Collections website. Qualitative feedback of the community's view of CSH will come from a focus group of interviewees pre- and post-interview. Finally, we will distribute mixed-method visitor surveys to those who visit the exhibits and symposium and will record responses. Indicators of success will be a statistically-significant change in measures of our focus group towards both the value and significance of CSH in community history and a similarly measured change in the perspective of attendees of the exhibit and symposium towards neurodiverse individuals and those living with mental illness (particularly those formerly at CSH).

With support from the IMLS mentor, Primary Contact Houser will oversee and record the project's progression using both qualitative and quantitative measures by tracking timeline and activities. Primary Contact Houser will coordinate periodic meetings of project personnel to gain qualitative feedback on project design elements. These responses will be submitted as part of the required IMLS reports.

Risk Mitigation & Sustainability:

Due to the unique nature of our project, we have also carefully considered the issue of how to deal with psychiatric information pertaining to former CSH patients. For this reason, all CSH oral history interviews -- both in their audio files and in their written transcripts-- will be reviewed for potential redactions in consultation with a legal expert familiar with HIPAA regulations.

The Twin Lakes Library System and Georgia College have local resources that could be utilized if costs are higher than expected. Additional interviews after the conclusion of the project can be conducted and incorporated into the digital exhibit. The use of the scanning equipment provided by Georgia College and Twin Lakes can continue the preservation of community memory well after the conclusion of the project. Working with neurodiverse populations can present risks, which will be mitigated by proper training of interns, observance of proper procedure, and following a strict protocol concerning privacy. We expect the success of this project if awarded the grant, will elicit additional stories, artifacts, and resources for preserving, sharing, and contextualizing such a vital part of our community's history, and that we may conduct oral interviews at minimal additional cost.

