



## Inspire! Grants for Small Museums

Sample Application IGSM-255932-OMS-24  
Project Category: Collections Stewardship and Access  
Project Type: Small Project (\$5,000-\$25,000)

### Oneida Community Mansion House

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$25,000
Amount of cost share:	\$0

The Oneida Community Mansion House (OCMH) will inventory and catalog approximately 850 objects in its care to preserve and improve access to its collection and advance knowledge of the Oneida Community and its relevance in United States history. OCMH staff will hire a part-time collections manager to inventory and photograph objects, create and update digital catalog records, and implement a collection storage plan and location system for two collections storage areas. Completion of this project will result in increased intellectual and physical control over the collection. Improving preservation and access to the collection will benefit visitors, students, researchers, historians, and Oneida Community descendants.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion
- Digital Product Plan
- Performance Measurement Plan

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 Overview**

Oneida Community Mansion House (OCMH) seeks a \$25,000 Inspire! Grant for Small Museums for a year long project to conduct an inventory and baseline catalog for two storage areas of its collection that comprises around 850 objects. This project falls under IMLS's Goal 3: Collections Stewardship and Access, specifically Objective 3.1: Support collections care and management. Funding from IMLS will support the hiring of a part-time Collections Manager who will 1) conduct an inventory of two collections storage areas, 2) create basic catalog records and documentary photographs, and 3) organize and implement a standardized location system in the two storage areas.

Creating a partial inventory, baseline catalog records for a frequently used portion of the collection, and reorganizing two storage areas using collections management best practices are significant steps toward supporting our strategic plan to improve the care and accessibility of the collection. In order to achieve these goals, the Mansion House will seek an emerging museum professional who will act as dedicated collections staff to accomplish the necessary tasks. This project will help OCMH gain a better understanding of the collection and keep it secure, while also providing an emerging museum professional a substantial project to add to their portfolio. Gaining physical and intellectual control over our collection is essential to our mission "to share the story of the Oneida Community and to explore pressing social issues that still confront audiences today," especially as the institution preserving the most extensive collection of material culture from the Community, and the only institution preserving the Oneida Ltd. story.

OCMH plans to hire a part-time Collections Manager to continue working on the next phase of a collections documentation project begun in fall of 2022. OCMH preserves dynamic and diverse collection of objects that span from the 1840s through the early 2000s, including furniture, textiles (including quilts and the Community's short dress), thousands of books from the Community's library, business records, thousands of photographs, and household items—especially Oneida Ltd. silverware. The first phase of our collections documentation project focused on this Oneida Ltd. collection and began to address OCMH's need for better accountability, access, and understanding of our collection materials in storage to ensure the collection is usable for staff, researchers, descendants of the Community, and visitors from school groups to seniors.

The preservation of the Mansion House itself has been the focus of the Board of Trustees for the last 10 years. As such, less attention was paid to the collection. Documentation lags behind and the full collection has never been inventoried or cataloged to professional standards. No comprehensive system to easily locate collections was ever developed. The last partial inventory was completed in 2014, so many location records are now inaccurate. To locate a specific object for research or exhibition, or even to see what is present in the collection, staff must physically search collection storage areas. Only about one fifth of the collection—2,000 objects—have had their records updated within the last five years, and most not since they were first accessioned in the late 1990s or early 2000s. Until 2022, very few objects even had images accompanying their records in our collections management system, Pastperfect. As a result, accountability and accessibility of the collection is a major challenge facing OCMH today.

In addition to museum displays and collections storage, the Mansion House operates as a historic inn, residence, and event space. Collections have often been shuffled around to different rooms throughout the building to make space for apartments or offices. The rooms now designated for collections are often quite small and with complicated layouts. Because there is limited space, it is essential that we not only maximize space, but carefully evaluate each object for relevance to OCMH's mission. Prior to adopting a new Collecting Policy in 2023, anything

remotely related to the Community and its descendants has been donated without clear relevance. Documenting our collections room by room allows us to assess which objects may be appropriate for deaccession, or may not have been accessioned at all and stored unnecessarily in limited collections spaces.

Additionally, most knowledge of the collection is currently held in employee or volunteer memory and haphazardly documented in PastPerfect. There is a significant risk that information about the location, donor, or significance of certain objects could be inaccessible or even lost due to staff turnover. OCMH is a small museum with only one permanent, full-time dedicated museum professional who is responsible for a variety of tasks including exhibitions, tours and programs, grant writing, and collections management. OCMH needs a dedicated Collections Manager to achieve our strategic goal of stewardship and wrangling the collections into usable shape.

The care and organization of the collection has become a higher priority since hiring a Director of Museum Affairs in 2021 who made it clear that OCMH needs to do more to preserve the collections. Since 2021, OCMH has completed several projects in support of sound stewardship of collections.

The first phase of our first year-long collections inventory and documentation project focused on our Oneida Ltd. collection of silverware, war materiel, and advertising, most of which was never formally accessioned after moving into OCMH's collections storage in 2014. This project would not have been possible without a dedicated Collection Fellow who spent the majority of their 35 hour work week on collections management tasks. The Oneida Ltd. project provides a clear model for how to complete such the proposed documentation project and others going forward. This effort also allowed the Director of Museum Affairs to expand the scope and number of objects on display for an exhibition on Oneida Ltd. in addition to populating museum spaces with more appropriate objects and allowing greater access to the collection for visitors.

OCMH also completed a Collections Assessment in 2022 with Frank & Glory Consulting, which outlines certain areas of improvement, particularly storage organization, governance, and documentation (see Supportingdoc1). This assessment spurred us to rewrite and adopt our new Collections Management Policy during the Spring of 2023, as well as create the museum's first Collections Procedure to standardize collections activities, particularly numbering, cataloging and photographing.

Having more intellectual control over our collections benefits the entire rural Central New York Region that does not have a plethora of cultural heritage centers. The project will allow OCMH to expand exhibitions, tours, online access, and other educational opportunities to share diverse stories with people all over Central New York and beyond. This improved understanding can be passed on to descendants, researchers, students, and the casual visitor by providing a deeper, more thorough experience of a rich history when visiting. Descendants and former employees of Oneida Ltd. will be especially served as OCMH serves as the repository of their rich histories and material record.. Finally, the project will provide more opportunities for school groups to learn about the material culture of the Mansion House.

As an example, during the Fall of 2023, OCMH partnered with Colgate University to run a history and museum studies course focused on the Oneida Community. Students were immersed in the collection throughout the semester working towards a publicly facing installation that foregrounds the ways in which objects can tell diverse stories. Although we were adequately able to provide collections materials for the class to research, digging deeper into

the collection in the future would result in more fruitful collaborations with new partners if we had better documentation of the collection to begin with.

**Project Work Plan**

Thomas A. Guiler, PhD, Director of Museum Affairs, will act as Project Director overseeing the project and creating goals that reflect the strategic plan for the museum and collection. The part-time Collections Manager, once recruited, hired, and trained by the Project Director, will be responsible for implementing the project as well as tracking and evaluating progress.

The Project Director, in consultation with the Executive Director and Board of Trustees, will hire a part-time Collections Manager. Preference will be given to recruits who have experience with inventory and cataloging, PastPerfect, object photography, and collections moves or relocation projects. For this reason, we expect to hire an emerging museum professional who already has some experience in collections or curatorial work. We anticipate the hiring process to take one to two months, beginning September 1, 2024. Buffer time is built into the end of the project should the search take longer than anticipated.

The part-time Collections Manager will work 25 hours a week over a 12-month period across a series of collections storage rooms prioritized by the Project Manager. By the end of the project, every object in the rooms outlined will be inventoried and basic catalog information, a photograph, and its location will be entered into the database. To accomplish this goal, the Collections Manager will perform the following activities:

- Review accessioned items to assess cataloging needs.
- Create and implement a step-by-step guide to re-organize storage areas with a usable location tracking system; remove non-collection items from collection storage.
- Update catalog records in PastPerfect following Collections Procedure Manual.
- Take basic photographs of cataloged items, process photos, and upload to PastPerfect.
- Note condition of objects and rehouse items in appropriate storage as needed.
- Re-shelve objects and update location.
- Identify candidates for deaccession; create a plan for disposal.
- Identify personnel, supplies, equipment, and additional funds necessary to complete inventory in other rooms.

One risk to the project is data loss as a result of equipment malfunction or data misuse. We will mitigate this risk by backing up our database and digital images and other files at least once per week during the course of the project and storing backup files offsite.

Another risk to the project is recruiting, hiring, and retaining the part-time Collections Manager over the course of the grant period. The Mansion House is located in a rural area which could mean a long commute. The Mansion House is able to provide on-site housing to help mitigate this issue for a potential employee. We also assured that the salary is competitive to recruit the desired experience level of staff.

Another risk could be adherence to schedule. Since we do not know precisely how many objects are in the rooms we intended to inventory, unanticipated finds could slow progress. However, we have planned for this risk by adding a cushion of time and overestimating the number of objects in each room to allow for inevitable unforeseen circumstances. Completing the inventory of the two rooms outlined may also take less time than we had planned. If this is the case, we have outlined an additional room with similar issues that the Collection Manager can move on until the end of the grant period.

OCMH will undertake the collections documentation project over a period of 13 months from September 1, 2024 through September 30, 2025. We request \$25,000 to hire a part-time Collections Manager who will work 25 hours a week beginning in October 2024.

The two rooms proposed for this project are Room 303, which mostly contains textiles, archival materials, and framed works on paper, and Room 314, which mostly contains glass, ceramics, miscellaneous other household objects, and institutional records that do not belong in collections storage. Room 303 contains less collection objects overall, but is more disorganized and has virtually no formal location system. Room 314 contains more collection objects, but is more organized and has labeled shelves by object type. We chose these two spaces as the next priority to tackle because they contain some of the most (known) interesting objects we already use regularly or may want to use in the future for exhibits, tours, and other programming.

While working on a specific room, we estimate that the Collections Manager will spend 20 hours a week on inventorying, cataloging, photographing, and rehousing objects, and the remaining 5 hours a week on storage and deaccession planning. These hours will be flexible if more time needs to be spent cataloging and photographing toward the beginning of the project, and more time addressing deaccessions and future storage planning toward the end of the project. The rate of cataloging is estimated based on the rate of cataloging from our previous Oneida Ltd. collections project in 2022, where the Collections Fellow documented (numbered, researched, cataloged, photographed, and rehoused) approximately 30 objects a week over the course of the project while working 35 hours a week, and also completing other tasks. Since the part-time Collections Manager will be focused on documentation for at least 20 hours a week, we are confident based on prior experience that they will be able to work through objects at a slightly faster pace.

Based on an estimate of 240 objects in Room 303, it will take roughly 8 weeks (2 months) to fully catalog, photograph, rehouse, and reshelve the objects in this room, with roughly 40 minutes spent per object for 30 objects per week over 20 hours per week. This room has fewer objects, but the room is in more disarray so it will take longer to document each object.

Based on an estimate of 600 objects in Room 314, it will take roughly 15 weeks (approx. 4 months) to fully catalog, photograph, rehouse, and reshelve the objects in this room, with roughly 30 minutes spent per object for 40 objects per week over 20 hours per week. This room has more objects, but they are better inventoried and the room is more organized so it will take less time to document each object.

Roughly 2-3 weeks will be spent on creating a collections storage plan for that space before starting to document any of the collections. This will both familiarize the Collections Manager with the collections in the room as well as create a more organized system for re-shelving the collections once they have been properly documented.

Based on their collections storage plan, the Collections Manager may request additional shelving units or housing for particular objects to ensure they are stored properly. Since OCMH has a variety of shelving, archival boxes, and other housing components in storage, we will aim to use these materials first. Any additional supplies will come out of OCMH's budget.

The Collections Manager and Project Director will work together, meeting on a weekly basis, to track the progress of this project by monitoring the Schedule of Completion and following the Performance Measurement Plan. We will measure the effectiveness of the reorganization of these spaces and their documentation by testing how long it takes to find objects at the

beginning of the project, and re-evaluating once each room is finished. Ideally, objects in storage should be easily located in under two minutes.

### **Project Results**

The intended results of this project are to improve preservation and access to collection objects and associated information. Our goal is to improve the knowledge of our collection and increase access by thoroughly documenting roughly 8-10% of the collection in storage over the course of a year. This means creating and/or updating approximately 850 catalog records, locations, and object photos (see Digital Products Plan). Combined with our previous project documenting the Oneida Ltd. collection, the results of the proposed project will mean at least a third of the entire OCMH collection will have been inventoried and documented following current professional standards since 2022. This puts us on track to complete the entire collection by 2030.

Two reorganized storage areas (Rooms 303 and 314) are another significant result of this project. Inventories of these two rooms with accurate location records will assist in maintaining organization and intellectual control over the collection. The object photos produced with this project means that museum staff will not need to physically search through collections storage or unnecessarily handle objects to understand what is available in the collection. In the short term, the care and accountability of our collections will improve for all objects in these spaces because they will be stored properly and be easy to locate. Preventive conservation will be more easily accomplished as a result of organized collections spaces. This output addresses OCMH's need for improved findability and accessibility of our collections and our ultimate goal of inventorying and creating a baseline catalog for the entire collection.

Longer term, this project will allow for the public to have a more dynamic understanding of the Oneida Community and its legacy and relevance to 21st century life. It will allow staff and docents to create new exhibits, tours, digital experiences through our partner organizations, programming, and workshops to the people we serve most—Central New Yorkers who without the Mansion House would be forced to travel further afield for cultural heritage experiences. In essence, this project is essential in meeting our mission and maintaining relevancy.

Built into the workflow of this project is for the Collections Manager to identify personnel, supplies, equipment, and additional funds necessary to complete inventories and documentation projects in other rooms. Further, the completion of the proposed project will help build the museum staff's capacity to maintain organized and easy access to at least a third of the collection in storage, a portion that is most frequently used. The success and benefits of the project can also help OCMH acquire further grant funding for similar projects in the future to complete the full inventory and baseline catalog of the collection. Additionally, the demonstrable benefits of having better access to collections can help museum staff advocate for setting aside funds for collections from operating funds, particularly because a member of staff dedicated to collection frees up the Director of Museum Affairs to work on education, grant applications, and other revenue-earning programs like tours and events.

The care, management, and access of the collection will improve because an additional 8-10% of the collection will have object photos as well as updated catalog and location records, promoting stewardship and intellectual control of the collection. Additionally, two collection storage areas will be improved and usable as a result of this project, promoting physical access to the collection. Lastly, sorting through the collection in such a thorough way will provide opportunities to check the state of preservation and note any issues for further action.



## **Digital Products Plan**

Over the course of the proposed project, the Oneida Community Mansion House (OCMH) Collections Manager will photograph objects that do not have a photograph, update and create new digital objects records in PastPerfect, and create an inventory of at least two collection storage areas.

### **Type**

Any records and files created will be backed up via a cloud-based backup system, as well as an external removable drive kept in a separate area offsite and through OCMH's GoogleDrive. This includes our PastPerfect software database, which is backed up manually at least once a week.

### Object Catalogs

The Collections Manager will update or create object records in PastPerfect as needed. These will be stored in PastPerfect 5.0. All updated and new records will include an object name, short description, home location, condition, dimensions, and object image, as well as other information as available and as time allows. The object records will be created and standardized following OCMH's Collections Procedure created in 2023. We expect to update over 800 records over the course of the project.

### Object Images and Scans

The Collections Manager will capture digital still images of any objects that do not already have a photograph associated with their PastPerfect record. The museum will preserve master JPEG files with unique object identifiers in addition to attaching these tiles to PastPerfect records. For certain flat, 2D objects, it may be more suitable to scan the piece, in which case they will be saved as a .TIFF file with minimum 300 dpi.

### Inventories

As part of the documentation process, the Collections Manager will populate an inventory spreadsheet for each object location. These will primarily be for internal use and location tracking, but will be preserved after all information is updated in PastPerfect. They will be created in Microsoft Excel and be preserved both as Excel spreadsheets and PDF. We expect to create two inventory worksheets, one for each room in the project.

The full catalog records and digital images of objects created during this project will be for internal or exhibit use only. The project will also involve the creation or update of Word Documents or PDFs outlining procedures for cataloging and object photography, also for internal use. These will be stored on our organizational Google Drive.

### **Availability**

Images and catalog records created as part of the proposed project will be made readily available for use by staff and docents. OCMH does not yet have an online collections database, though it is something we are working toward in our strategic plan. Our intent is to have more of our collection digitized and data cleaned up before moving forward with an online catalog.



Despite this current limitation, OCMH regularly seeks out opportunities to promote the collection and make it more widely available. Over the past few years we have selected interesting portions of our collection to digitize for [New York Heritage](#), [Consider the Source New York](#), as well as through the digital collections of [Hamilton College's Communal Studies Collection](#). As part of the proposed inventory and cataloging project, we will flag any portions of the collection that may be suitable for publication to these or other sources to ensure that our collection is available and accessible to the public. We also regularly share important or interesting collections finds via our social media channels to let our audience know what is becoming available for future inquiry.

### **Access**

Some records created during this project may be requested by researchers, genealogists, descendants, or students. Any scans of images or digital representations of collections objects will be made available under the Creative Commons licenses or non-commercial usage rights statements as applicable.

### **Sustainability**

Ensuring that our records are accessible for the long term is a core part of our mission, and making these records available to the public via an online database is a primary goal of our strategic plan for collections. The majority of digital products created in the course of this project will be catalog records and their associated object images. The sustainability of these objects is mostly dependent on the sustainability of PastPerfect software. OCMH will ensure our local Pastperfect remains operational by installing new updates, backing up our records locally and remotely, and maintaining our computer systems.

**Applicant Name: Oneida Community Mansion House**

**Project Title: Oneida Community Mansion House Collections Project**

<p><b>Performance Measure</b></p>	<p><b>Data We Will Collect</b> (e.g., counts, costs, weights, volumes, temperatures, percentages, hours, observations, opinions, feelings)</p>	<p><b>Source of Our Data</b> (e.g., members of the target group, project staff, stakeholders, internal/external documents, recording devices, databases)</p>	<p><b>Method We Will Use</b> (e.g., survey, questionnaire, interview, focus group, informal discussion, observation, assessment, document analysis)</p>	<p><b>Schedule</b> (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually, beginning/end)</p>
<p><b>Effectiveness:</b> The extent to which activities contribute to achieving the intended results</p>	<p><b>Example:</b> At the end of each month, using a report prepared by the registrar, we will compare the cumulative count of rehoused objects against the total number proposed for the project. <b>Example:</b> At the end of each project year, our external consultant will present results of the ongoing observation-based evaluation and compare them against our intended project results.</p> <p>At the end of each week, the Collections Manager will compile a brief report of progress, specifically how many objects records have been updated in Pastperfect, how many new object records have been added in Past Perfect, and how many objects have new digital photos in PastPerfect, and what, if any, objects have been rehoused. The Project Director will compare this report against the anticipated quota of an average of 30 objects a week (approx. 240 objects over 8 weeks) for room 303 and an average of 40 objects a week (approx. 600 objects over 15 weeks) for room 314 .</p> <p>We will also measure the effectiveness of the reorganization of the two collections storage spaces and their documentation by testing how long it takes to find objects at the beginning of the project, and re-evaluating once each room is finished. The goal is to locate objects in under 2 minutes.</p> <p>By the end of the grant period, the Collection Manager will create a storage plan for the remaining parts of the collection to be implemented by future staff.</p>			
<p><b>Efficiency:</b> How well resources (e.g., funds, expertise, time) are used and costs are minimized while generating maximum value for the target group</p>	<p><b>Example:</b> Twice per year, we will assess our expenditures for program supplies on a per-person-served basis. <b>Example:</b> Each quarter, we will calculate the dollar value of volunteer hours contributed to the project as recorded in our online volunteer management system.</p> <p>We will track progress as it relates to staff time spent on project. Each quarter, the Project Director will calculate the amount of time and money spent on each object cataloged, photographed, and updated in PastPerfect using our time tracking system and reports prepared by the Collections Manager.</p>			

<p><b>Quality:</b> How well the activities meet the requirements and expectations of the target group</p>	<p><b>Example:</b> At the beginning, the mid-point, and end of the project, we will administer a satisfaction survey to staff who have participated in the training.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> We will gather opinions about our online services through questionnaires provided to every 20<sup>th</sup> user.</p> <p>By the end of February 2025, objects entered into PastPerfect from Room 303 will have been reviewed for accuracy and quality of data. By the end of July 2025, objects entered into PastPerfect from room 314 will have been reviewed for accuracy and quality of data.</p> <p>By the end of the grant period, 75% of the materials identified for deaccessioning will have gone through the deaccessioning process and been disposed of from the site. A plan will be in place to remove the rest of the deaccession candidates by the end of the grant period should 100% not already be accessioned.</p>
<p><b>Timeliness:</b> The extent to which each task/activity is completed within the proposed timeframe</p>	<p><b>Example:</b> Every six months, our Project Director will assess the fit between our proposed Schedule of Completion and actual activity completion dates.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> Each quarter, each project partner will submit to our Project Director a templated report showing their progress on meeting project milestones.</p> <p>Every quarter (3 months), the Collections Manager and Project Director will review the proposed Schedule of Completion and actual activity completion dates for variance.</p> <p>Every month, the Collections Manager will calculate the number of objects cataloged and photographed per hours of work.</p>