

NEH White Paper for Grant # PW-51397-13

Project Title: Preparing to Preserve, Digitize, and Catalog the Southeast Chicago Historical Museum Collection

Project Director: Christine J. Walley, Associate Professor of Anthropology

Grantee Institution: MIT

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## **f. Project Activities**

### *Overview:*

The goal of the completed project was to assess the collection of the all-volunteer Southeast Chicago Historical Museum (SECHM) and to lay the foundations both for digitizing, preserving, and cataloguing portions of that collection and for making it publicly accessible through an interactive website.

The museum is located in Southeast Chicago, which, along with northwest Indiana, once formed one of the largest concentrations of industry found in the United States and the world. This former steel-making region has also been home to a diverse group of residents who came to work in the steel mills, including whites (many immigrants from Eastern-Europe); Mexican-Americans; and, later, African-Americans. Southeast Chicago was central to 19th and 20th century histories of industrialization and labor activism and also experienced the widespread social and economic fallout linked to deindustrialization that has plagued many parts of the Midwest and the United States more generally. The Southeast Chicago Historical Museum was founded in the early 1980s as the regional steel industry was collapsing, and it quickly became a central repository for area residents to collect and preserve artifacts relating to the industrial as well as social, cultural, and environmental history of this once economically vibrant region. The Museum's collection provides a window onto the diverse populations and contested history of Southeast Chicago, the varied meanings this history has held for residents, and the efforts of community leaders to shape a still-emergent post-industrial future.

This project is significant for its efforts to preserve working-class history largely from the point of view of working-class residents themselves. Currently access to the materials located in this one-room museum in an out-of-the-way corner of Chicago is limited. The museum is entirely staffed by volunteers and is only open one afternoon per week. Given strong space constraints, the museum functions more as an archive/repository and many of its holdings can be difficult to access. Greater public access is being laid through plans for an interactive website that would consist of both a searchable archive and a more narrative-based "story-telling" component intended to increase public interest in and engagement with this history and its artifacts. The larger vision for the project weaves together the disciplines of history and cultural anthropology in illuminating ways. It seeks to increase access to the material documents and artifacts of this region's history, but also asks how and why this history has been understood in particular ways by area residents, why they have chosen to preserve certain artifacts, what stories are told about these artifacts, and what these artifacts can tell us both about the history of the region and the United States more broadly. The website will allow increase access to scholars, students, residents, and the general public who wish to research materials relating to industrialization, immigration, labor history, deindustrialization, and environmental issues, among other topics. It will also encourage greater public engagement through the storytelling component by offering a rich sense of what it was like to live in an American community in both its industrial and postindustrial eras and the implications that deindustrialization has had for the community.

The main activities conducted under the grant included:

### **preliminary and coordinating activities**

- purchasing equipment
- hiring an archivist to work with the collection
- consultations with an advisory committee

### **core activities**

- conducting an inventory and assessment of portions of the collection
- developing plans for digitization, preservation, and cataloguing
- conducting test transfers for future digitization
- solidifying intellectual and copyright control
- prioritizing museum materials for use on the website

### **and future-oriented work** (*directed towards public access through the interactive website*)

- attendance by PI and Chris Boebel at weekly MIT seminars on online documentary work
- selection of a web designer
- coordination among the archivist, web designer, metadata specialist, PI and museum board in developing a metadata scheme to support access, exploration and analysis by multiple audiences (including scholars, students, residents, journalists and general public)
- creating preliminary connections with public history projects in other deindustrialized communities with an eye to linking websites in the future

The budget for this foundational work was supplemented by a \$9,911 grant from MIT's School of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Research Fund which helped pay for: additional travel to Chicago by PI and Boebel; some test digitization transfers; additional work hours by the hired archivist; and mock-ups of the future website created by web designer. The funds provided by NEH were crucial in MIT's decision to support additional funding for this project.

### *Preliminary and coordinating activities*

Preliminary activities under this grant occurred during May 2014 and included purchase of a macbook computer, back-up drives, and scanner for use by the Southeast Chicago Historical Museum (SECHM). Purchases were made in consultation with MIT Libraries, Team Member Chris Boebel, and the Director of SECHM Rod Sellers. The computer was loaded with Archivist Toolkit and other software by MIT's Information and Technology Services. Archivist Diane Pugh was formally hired for the project through the MIT Temps system and received an MIT ID number allowing her to access computer support from MIT's IS&T. Both computer and scanner were shipped to Chicago. MIT Libraries provided support to Pugh regarding use of the software and questions arising from the imminent shift to ArchivesSpace. Diane Pugh also had a preliminary meeting at SECHM and did a walk-through of the site with the Director.

Over the course of the grant period, an advisory committee provided guidance for this project. This committee included:

PI: Christine Walley, anthropologist of Southeast Chicago, MIT  
Chris Boebel, filmmaker and media specialist, MIT  
Rod Sellers, Director, Southeast Chicago Historical Museum (SECHM)  
Barney Janecki, President, SECHM  
Joann Podkul, board member, SECHM  
Ed Sadlowski, former Director United Steelworkers Local #65, founding member of SECHM  
Dominic Pacyga, historian of Chicago and Southeast Chicago, Columbia College  
Madeleine Tudor, Field Museum  
Peter Alter, Chicago History Museum  
Nancy McGovern, MIT Libraries, Curation and Preservation Services

Ann Marie Willer, MIT Libraries, Curation and Preservation Services  
Ellen Duranceau, MIT Libraries, Scholarly Publishing, Copyright, and Licensing  
Kurt Fendt, Digital Humanities specialist, MIT

Additional SECHM board members and volunteers occasionally participated in advisory committee meetings.

The advisory committee met six times – twice in person in Chicago and four times via phone conferencing over the term of the grant and was instrumental in providing feedback and the range of expertise needed to complete the proposed work. After preliminary activities were completed, a phone conference call with the Advisory Committee was held June 4, 2014 to offer guidance in terms of prioritization of content for the future website and to provide guidance to archivist Diane Pugh in her work at the museum. Each committee member was asked to reflect upon the goals of the project as per the proposal, suggest ideas for prioritization, and share both advice and words of caution based on their own backgrounds and experience. Particularly pertinent advice included suggestions to: emphasize materials unique to SECHM; emphasize experiences of everyday lives; use materials that reflected the diversity of experiences in Southeast Chicago along lines of gender, ethnicity and race; identify any gaps in the materials and consider how to address them; and prioritize themes for the future website for which SECHM held a range of materials in multiple media (i.e. film or video, photos, documents, oral histories, etc). MIT Libraries preservationist Ann Willer also emphasized the need for housing the back-up drive of the SECHM computer in multiple locations with one located in Chicago and a second in Cambridge, MA.

A follow-up in-person meeting was held in July 14, 2014 at SECHM with the PI, Chicago-based members of the advisory committee, museum board and some additional members in attendance. Museum director Rod Sellers and Archivist Diane Pugh presented a powerpoint of some of the unique materials held by the museum that they considered of possible interest for the future website based on Advisory Committee criteria, including glass negative photographs of the steel mill area taken by a local doctor in the 1890s; a midwife's diary written in Croatian between 1915 and 1933; WWII letters between a plant union representative and former employees serving in the military; and a scrapbook about the 1937 Memorial Day Massacre labor event with handwritten notes by an eye-witness. PI and Team Member Boebel also presented ideas and solicited feedback regarding the future website.

Subsequent meetings of the advisory committee (including a second meeting in Chicago) provided feedback on the assessment report compiled by archivist Diane Pugh, included updates on the progression of the project, solicited further advice, and, at the end of the grant period, discussed next stages for the project. Gaps in the collection and how to address those gaps were also discussed (for example, the need to prioritize locating materials relating to women's work, such as taking in lodgers, which might not always have been formally documented, as well as materials relating to African-Americans who often worked in the steel mills but less frequently lived in Southeast Chicago historically due to housing discrimination).

In other supervisory activities, PI Walley maintained regular email contact with Pugh, held additional phone conferences with her and the Director, and travelled to Chicago on two other occasions to help determine materials for prioritization and to work with Pugh in

conducting an inventory of parts of the collection. Walley also created a list of prioritized materials for the future website for further discussion among project members.

One challenge we faced in coordinating activities was the fact that the SECHM Director, a key team member, became seriously ill and was unavailable to participate during most of the latter half of the grant. Although this had a considerable impact on some activities, we, nevertheless, managed to successfully complete the initial objectives of the grant even if at a somewhat slower pace.

#### *Assessing and Developing Plans for Cataloguing and Processing of the collection*

An assessment of the collection was provided by archivist Diane Pugh, who was allotted 280 hours, with some additional hours funded by MIT (see attached report in Appendix A). One of both the strengths and challenges faced by the museum is that it was created and maintained for over 30 years entirely by volunteer labor. This is a strongpoint in that the collection is unique, was largely curated by area residents who themselves donated materials to the museum, and has very high integration into the community. This is a challenge in that the museum has not had professional archival help up until this point and considerable labor will be required to fully process this collection.

During the course of the grant, it was determined that although the museum has not been catalogued or processed, 98% of materials in museum have accession numbers (albeit recorded under different schemes that require coordination). Pugh began initial work entering records into Archivist's Toolkit. However, given the transition to ArchivesSpace, other pressing needs, and the scope of required cataloguing and processing, this work was of necessity preliminary. In a report for the museum board, Pugh outlined possible cataloguing schemes and possible directions for future work. One outcome of the assessment has been recognition of the need to apply for additional external funds to provide ongoing professional help with cataloguing and processing over multiple years.

Given the substantial work to be done with the collection, considerable time was spent conducting inventories (in addition to inventory work that was already done by Museum volunteers). A map of the museum and key were created (see Appendix B) and inventories were taken of prioritized parts of the collection. Pugh also compiled various kinds of information and resources as references for the Museum board and volunteers as they continue this organizational work. Suggestions were also made for training volunteers. We are seeking MIT funding for a one-day workshop to be held in 2016 to help train volunteers in some of this organizational work.

The archivist also provided input regarding the prioritization of possible materials for the website based on guidelines established by the advisory committee and input from the Museum Director and PI. Pugh also used archivists' listservs like the Lone Arrangers Roundtable of the Society of American Archivists to research the particular preservation needs of items like magnetic sticky page photo albums from the 1970s, of which SECHM holds a large number, as well as for other matters such as evaluations of equipment, vendors, and software; information on digital preservation tools; and advice on particular needs such as techniques for transcribing handwritten materials.

#### *Inventories and Test Digitization Scans and Transfers*

Another core activity included taking inventories of audiovisual materials in the museum, since they are prioritized for preservation given their fragility and existence on increasingly

obsolete formats. In addition, a number of test digitization scans and transfers were conducted. An overview of audiovisual materials was carried out by PI Christine Walley and archivist Diane Pugh. Given that audiovisual media was stored in different parts of museum under somewhat different numbering systems, it required some effort to locate and inventory all the audiovisual media in the museum. An inventory was also undertaken of oral histories, given that they are some of the most valuable and unique materials in the museum both for their historical value and as materials that can provide needed contextualization for the artifacts on the “storytelling” end of the future website. The archivist and PI conducted an inventory of oral histories located in various parts of the museum. It was determined that there are 106 original VHS tapes of oral histories (many with audio-backups; others with none). Although some oral histories had been transcribed, many others, including the prioritized Mexican-American history oral history project collection, had not yet been. After test transfers were completed of several unbacked-up and untranscribed taped oral histories, they were sent to a volunteer for transcription.

Through this work it was determined that the museum holds nearly 10,000 images, 246 original VHS tapes, 42 original Hi-8 tapes, 16 original DVDs, 28 original reels of 16mm and 8 mm film, and 24 original audiocassettes (as well as hundreds of back-up audiocassettes originating in other formats). The decision was made to request future funding for bulk digitization of the entire audio-visual collection given their fragility and prioritization for preservation.

Test transfers and scans were conducted by PI Christine Walley and Team Member Chris Boebel during the period of the grant, some funded through NEH and some through the supplemental MIT funds. These tests included 7 VHS tapes, 2 audiocassettes, and 2 Hi-8 video tapes. The audiocassettes were transferred to 16 bit wav.files. The videotapes were used to create three digitized files for each tape that will be the standard for future transfers:

- 1) A lossless archival master in Motion-JPEG format.
- 2) A mezzanine file in high bit-rate H.264 QuickTime format.
- 3) A proxy file in low bit-rate H.264 QuickTime format.

The film reels will have color corrected transfers. Quotes were solicited from Crawford Media in Atlanta, Georgia and Color Lab in Rockville, Maryland for transfer of tapes and film respectively (see Appendix C).

The museum also holds 85 scrapbooks and a variety of original documents including diaries, letters, and postcards. This is in addition to a wide range of non-original materials that would not be prioritized for preservation including extensive collections of local and regional newspapers and periodicals; steel mill literature and plant magazines; and union materials. After consultation with MIT Libraries Curation and Preservation staff, it was decided that in the future, scanning of documents and photographs would occur both in-house and, in some cases, through an outside vendor. Sample photo and document scans on postcards from the Museum collection were conducted in-house (600 dpi, TIFF files). It was determined that future digitization would consist of preservation quality scans (600 dpi, TIFF files), intermediary files (300 dpi jpegs with no compression), and thumbnails (72 dpi jpegs with medium compression).

MIT Libraries preservationist Ann Marie Willer has recommended future outsourcing of scanning for particularly fragile items. Appropriate vendors were solicited through contacts of Willer's at University of Chicago. The most likely vendor would be HF Group/ECS Conservation (with their offices in Brown's Summit, North Carolina used for bound materials including prioritized scrapbooks and diaries). Given that the latter part of this work happened after the end of the archivist's employment and after the volunteer Museum Director had taken ill, the lack of staffing limited our ability to move fragile materials outside the museum for professional test scanning. However, quotes were solicited from HF Group, and prices were determined to be: Photos up to 8" x 10" @ 600 dpi: 84 cents per image; between 8" x 10" and 11" x 17" 96 cents per image; and for oversized materials by quoted price. For documents, standard image capture for bound volumes up to 11"x15" would be for color/grayscale/bi-tonal .42/.72/\$1.20, and for loose pages up to 12x 18 would be .42/.48/.72. Oversize capture to A2 23.4" x 16.5" would be \$1.20/\$1.44/\$1.80 and up to 33.1" x 24.8" would be \$2.40/\$3.00/\$3.60.

*Plan for Establishing Intellectual Control over the Collection:*

During the grant period, an assessment of intellectual control issues relating to museum materials and their use on the proposed website was conducted by the PI, MIT Libraries copyright specialist Ellen Duranceau, and the project archivist. A detailed discussion of this assessment and of future plans to secure intellectual control can be found in Appendix D.

*Developing Plans for Public Access Through Future Website*

In order to help develop ideas for the future website, PI Walley and Team Member Boebel attended a weekly seminar sponsored by MIT's Open Documentary Lab (ODL), a leading venue for the development of new forms of online interactive documentary work including those exploring the creation of digital archives. Jeff Soyk, a Peabody-award winning and Emmy-nominated interactive documentary web designer who is also a current ODL fellow agreed to be the designer for the project. Ideas for the future website are being fleshed out through discussion with the advisory committee, Museum volunteers, and the Open Documentary Lab seminar. Exciting possibilities for bridging the explosion of digital archives with more interactive documentary "storytelling" around those artifacts in order to provide context for the materials and to generate interest among the general public was discussed. During the course of the NEH grant, preliminary meetings were held with Soyk about the design of the site. MIT funds were also used to allow Soyk to develop initial mockups of the future website (see Appendix E). A harddrive of prioritized audiovisual material and photographs of objects found in the museum were shared with Soyk to develop these mockups.

In the future, we hope to link the proposed website with other public history websites about industrial and postindustrial communities in the United States and Canada. Towards these ends, Walley presented at two conferences (with MIT funding), including the *Deindustrialization and its Aftermath* conference held in 2014 at Concordia University in Montreal and an American Anthropological Association conference in Washington, D.C. in December that included a panel "Steel Stories" highlighting multimedia materials and the use of public anthropology/public history to document the impact of deindustrialization in North America. Initial contacts were made at these events that we would like to pursue in creating future links among websites.

### *Developing a Metadata Scheme*

Given that museum materials have accession numbers but have not been formally processed or catalogued (and given the long-term ongoing nature of the cataloguing and processing work), it was determined through consultation with the archivist, web designer, and metadata specialist that the best route to enable searchability on the website would be to use accession numbers but to construct archival records in such a way that would allow for ongoing cataloguing and processing. This plan will allow us to prioritize public access to this material, while ongoing archival work continues. Archival records as they are computerized will contain categories for search categories to be found on the future website. Metadata will be stored separately from the formal cataloging information in ArchivesSpace, something particularly important since this project will be digitizing mainly individual objects and other portions of collections within the museum, rather than entire collections. However, the existence of the digital items will be noted in corresponding records in ArchivesSpace, whether those are accession records or resource records (i.e., records for formally processed materials).

Both the Project Archivist and Digital Humanities specialist Kurt Fendt have recommended use of Dublin Core as the standard that will be used for accessing, enhancing, and displaying the project's archival metadata. The standard is widely used by libraries and archives, and has been ratified in IETF, ANSI/NISO, and ISO standards. It is flexible enough so that it can be adapted to the specific needs of the project. The project will follow the recommendations specified in the *Western States Dublin Core Best Practices and Elements Set (WSDCBP)*, Version 2.0, 2005, available online at:

<http://www.thslc.org/encompass/documents/WSDCMBP.pdf>. In keeping with those best practices, mandatory elements used will include: Title, Creator (if available), Subject, Description, Date Digital (i.e., date the digital resource was created or last modified), Date Original (i.e., date of the original resource), Format, Digitization Specifications (i.e., information that supports preservation and quality control of the digital object over time), Resource Identifier (for this project, usually the accession number), and Rights Management. The standard also includes the following optional, but recommended elements: Publisher, Contributor, Type, Source, Language, Relation, Coverage, and Contributing Institution that will be used as applicable. Contributing Institution is usually used when a digitization project is a collaborative effort, and so may be used in this project to indicate when materials are digitized at the museum itself and when they are sent out to MIT or a vendor for digitization. A metadata scheme for audiovisual materials will be based on PB Core.

As indicated by the website mock-up pages, viewers will be able to search by category, keyword, time period and media type. Categories and keywords are being decided upon in consultation with the advisory committee and museum representatives. Agreed upon general categories (to be further developed) currently include: Steel mills; neighborhoods; churches; schools; family life; ethnic organizations; businesses; popular culture; and the environment. A range of keyword search terms are also being developed in conjunction with SECHM. As mentioned above, these categories will be added to archival records.

Archivists Toolkit and ArchivesSpace are both capable of outputting finding aids in EAD (Encoded Archival Description), which is the document type definition (DTD) for finding aids that are encoded for display on the Internet. It's therefore an important consideration that software chosen for the archives end of the website be compatible with EAD, which is soon to be updated to EAD3.



The archivist recommended Omeka as an open-source web publishing platform (<http://omeka.org/>) currently being used with many museum and archive repository projects. Omeka was discussed with the web designer who acknowledged its limitations for the more complex “storytelling” end of website but noted that both the storytelling and the archival ends of the website could pull in metadata from the museum's collection, as managed through the Omeka platform, while each would also require custom front-end development with back-end support. Advantages to Omeka are its open source nature, relative ease of use (potentially allowing museum volunteers greater ability to make changes to parts of the site), and its accessibility to others who would like to model similar projects on this example.

#### **g. Project Accomplishments**

During the term of the grant, the project accomplished a great deal towards its goals. The Southeast Chicago Historical Museum has been an all-volunteer museum for 30 years and has developed a unique and remarkable collection that would benefit from ongoing organizational work. The project took a large step forward in inventorying and providing an overview of the collection. It laid plans for future work in the museum while also providing information and standards for future preservation, digitizing, and cataloguing. Through the Advisory Committee, it also solidified ties with area institutions like the Field Museum, which plans to include SECHM and this project as part of its networks of institutions/projects associated with the Calumet Heritage Area, and with the Chicago History Museum which committed to receiving the digital and physical assets of SECHM and the proposed website if, for any unforeseen reason, that became necessary, thereby ensuring the long-term sustainability of this project.

In addition, substantial work was done in prioritizing materials from this collection for use on a future website that would vastly increase public access to this rich material. Preliminary plans and mockups have been developed for an innovative website that combines a working archive with a “storytelling” site about those objects in ways that promise to galvanize interest in these kinds of historical communities and in the artifacts themselves.

The most significant challenge to the project during the term of the grant was the serious illness faced by the volunteer Director of SECHM and the loss of his in-depth knowledge of the collection and on-the-ground supervision of the project in Chicago for several months. Given that much of the groundwork for the foundations grant work had been already laid, however, we were able to continue moving forward and accomplish our stated objectives. Although working across geographic regions was at times challenging, the project successfully managed to connect museum volunteers with experts both in the Chicago area and in the Boston/Cambridge area, bringing together a range of expertise joined by a common interest in preserving and making accessible this unique treasure trove of materials and the importance of the history of these now often neglected former industrial communities.

**h. Audiences** – Although this work is still in a foundation-building stage, ideas for the website project were presented at a range of conferences, universities, and colleges as part of Walley and Boebel’s ongoing work in Southeast Chicago that includes a book *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago* (University of Chicago Press, 2013) and a documentary film *Exit Zero: An Industrial Family Story* (dir. Chris Boebel, prod. Christine

Walley, 2015). An informational website for the transmedia “Exit Zero Project” ([www.exitzeroproject.org](http://www.exitzeroproject.org)) also includes a brief overview of the collaborative website project with the Southeast Chicago Historical Museum and has helped raise initial interest in the project.

Anticipated users for the future museum website include scholars as well as students interested in working class culture, industrial, postindustrial, or labor histories, immigration, and the environment (students may include regional high school students, college undergraduates, or graduate students including those using the website in a supplemental fashion to the existing *Exit Zero* book and film). Users would also include area residents and former residents - including the museum’s existing facebook group of 2100 – and those in other deindustrialized communities. And, finally, it would include a broader public interested in the changing economic landscape of the United States and in gaining a sense of what everyday life might have been like in an iconic American industrial community.

#### **i. evaluation**

Although no formal external evaluations were conducted, the diverse members of the project team and advisory committee with their divergent areas of expertise and experience were able to provide oversight and feedback on specific aspects of the project as well as its overall evolution. In addition to the six advisory committee meetings that provided general oversight, the PI also met or spoke on the phone individually with various advisory committee members soliciting feedback, sometimes on multiple occasions. In addition, one advisory committee meeting was dedicated entirely to providing feedback on the draft final report produced by archivist Diane Pugh while part of a second meeting was devoted to discussing the revised version.

#### **j. continuation of project**

We are currently applying for an NEH Implementation grant and other outside grants to continue with this work. As this project continues, we hope to hire a project manager with archivist training who can help oversee the project on the Chicago end and assist with communicating between Chicago-based and Cambridge-based participants. In addition, we plan to hire a separate part-time archivist to continue with ongoing tasks of cataloguing and processing. The Project Manager would conduct and oversee digitization of in-house materials and supervise sending audiovisual materials and more fragile documents and photos to vendors for digitization. Ongoing assessment of the physical condition of prioritized materials will be needed and the Project Manager will consult regularly with MIT Libraries Preservationist Ann Marie Willer by sending photos by iphone of any items in question.

We now have a much stronger sense of museum holdings and what might be prioritized for the website. Final selections from our master list of prioritized materials for the archive will happen in consultation with the the Museum board/volunteers and Advisory Committee and with added additional input from the web designer for the storytelling end. We plan to continue creating plans for the site with the web designer and, when funding allows, will hire a computer programmer to begin construction of the front and backends of the connected archive and storytelling ends of the website.

**k. long-term plan**

The long-term plan, if funding is available, is to complete digitization of portions of the collection and working parts of website by 2018. An additional year (and additional funding) will be required to continue with the substantial work of cataloguing and processing and for developing the more interactive parts of the “storytelling” piece of the website. This work will extend into 2019.

**l. grant products** (*products found in appendices are noted with an asterisk*)*products from archivist*

\*archivist’s assessment report

\*museum map and key

project log

SECHM inventory form

sample archiving processing manual

scrapbooks summary

large albums index

photo index

**Other:**

\* plan for establishing intellectual control of the collection

\* digitization quotes

\* mockups of future website

\* sample document/image scans

\* links to sample of test transfers from VHS tapes

list of search categories for future website