

Dennison Railroad Depot Museum



by Andy Verhoff, Ohio History Fund Grant Coordinator, Local History Services, Ohio History Connection

Members of the Ohio Local History Alliance are very successful at winning grants from the Ohio History Fund, the Ohio History Connection's competitive matching grant program for history projects.

As of October 2017, 26 Alliance members have netted more than \$250,000 in History Fund grants, almost half made since the program began in 2012. Approximately half of the 47 applicants in the round under consideration are Alliance members. To showcase the good that Alliance members do because of the History Fund, The Local Historian presents "Funding Brighter Futures: Local History + the History Fund." The content is excerpted from History Fund grantees' final project reports and follow-up interviews.

We hope these stories inspire you to apply for a History Fund grant. For more information about the History Fund, including an application, eligibility requirements, and deadlines, visit www.ohiohistory.org/historyfund or contact program coordinator, Andy Verhoff, 614-297-2341, averhoff@ohiohistory.org

We also hope these stories inspire you to give. As The Local Historian will proclaim during tax season, 100% of the money for History Fund grants is voluntarily given. It comes from donations of state income tax refunds, the sales of Ohio History "mastodon" license plates, and direct contributions to the Ohio History Connection for the History Fund. The more the History Fund receives in donations, the more it grants back to organizations like yours – maybe yours, if you apply!



The Dennison Railroad Depot Museum and Uhrichsville Clay Museum. Photo courtesy the Dennison Railroad Depot Museum.

GRANT RECIPIENT:	Dennison Railroad Depot Museum
PROJECT TITLE:	Artifact Emergency: Moving the Dennison Depot and Uhrichsville Clay Museum Collection
CATEGORY:	Programs & Collections
AWARD:	\$15,000
AMOUNT REQUESTED:	\$20,000 (partial grant made to accommodate funding for other projects)
GRANT YEAR:	2012-2013 (first year of History Fund)
ALLIANCE MEMBER SINCE:	1989

What did the project accomplish?

The combined missions of the Dennison Railroad Depot Museum and its neighbor the Uhrichsville Clay Museum is to collect, preserve, exhibit, interpret, and educate visitors on the history of southern Tuscarawas County, including Dennison's rich railroad and WWII heritage and the history of Uhrichsville, "Clay Capital of the World," and the surrounding region. The project, "Artifact Emergency," secured the museums' collections by moving them from many storage locations all over the area to a central location and thence to a new storage area.

The project was part of a larger initiative to move the museums'

collections into a new storage facility and greatly improve collections care. The museums did not want to move a collection full of problems into a new space; but rather tackle those problems in advance so that they could establish a new storage in an orderly fashion. With the help of project consultant Alexandra Nicholis Coon, director of the Massillon Museum, and guided by the findings in Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) report, the staff designed the new storage space.

Moving the artifacts to one location enabled the museums to streamline its procedures to inventory, accession, and photograph their collections and upgrade

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artifact storage. The museums have corrected past errors and filled many gaps in knowledge of the collections. At the time the grant project concluded in the summer of 2015, the museums have a collections action plan, authored by Ms. Coon, more than 850 new photographs of artifacts, 780 artifacts inventoried, 200 corrected Deeds of Gifts from previous donations, 350 new accessioned items, 225 boxes packed for future storage, and a new collections work station. As of October 2017, the staff of the museums has accessioned 2,050 objects, inventoried 1,500 artifacts, and photographed 350.

The museum used the History Fund grant to earn additional matching dollars - more than anticipated - and for a project with a total value of more than \$250,000. The History Fund's support of the project gave it a sort of "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" to local funders. That "seal of approval" enabled the museums to leverage support from the Tuscarawas County Convention & Visitors Bureau and others, making possible the purchase of additional equipment and supplies, including a large format photograph scanner, the donation of metal collections storage shelving, and a reference library on collections care. All this from a \$15,000 History Fund grant to pay for collections storage materials, PastPerfect collections management software, the computers and equipment needed to run the software, and some staff time.

The project also supported the museums' strategic goals. The museums undertook the project as it also sought StEPs certification for "Stewardship of Collections" from the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) ("StEPs" is the abbreviation for Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations). As of November 2017, the museums have completed all sections of StEPs and is preparing to apply for accreditation from the American Association of Museums in 2018. In addition, the project became an opportunity to attract new volunteers and interns, a total of 15. Collaborating with the nearby Massillon Museum was a fantastic experience as well, creating relationship that has grown closer in the two years since the close of the grant project.

Who benefits from the project?

This project benefits the residents of two communities, the Village of Dennison and the City of Uhrichsville. It also benefits the museums' average annual visitation of 30,000. With greater knowledge and access to the collection, the staff now make better use of the museums' collections for exhibits, programs,

and research. As repositories for the National Historic Landmark Dennison Railroad Depot and the "Clay Capital of the World" in Uhrichsville, the museums' collections have become a benefit for researchers and visitors nationally. When the Salvation Army celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2015 it requested the use of the Depot's WWII Salvation Army Canteen photographs. Because the museums' collections are now more accessible, they were able to easily locate a large cache of canteen photographs the museums did not know they had. The museums loaned these photographs to the Salvation Army and in return received nationwide notice. Moreover, purchases included equipment will benefit the museums for many years to come. PastPerfect will be the museums' collections database for decades. The museums' collections will grow, responsibly, and in line with their collections policies, as they attract donors who are happy with the way that the museums' staffs care for artifacts.

The project also benefited the museums' staff, interns, and volunteers. According to the museums' director, Wendy Zucal,



"It's Christmas!" Project principal and curator Kim Jurkovic opens boxes of collections storage supplies purchased in part with History Fund grant support. Photo courtesy the Dennison Railroad Depot Museum.



Big checks lead to bigger projects! At Statehood Day 2013, shown L to R: Burt Logan Glenda S. Greenwood of the Ohio History Connection congratulation Wendy Zucal and Jacob Masters of the Dennison Railroad Depot Museum

"we saw our volunteers and interns become more and more interested as each work party uncovered artifacts we did not know we had." Ms. Zucal also notes that "we also found many artifacts we "thought" we had by memory, but now concretely KNOW we have and know exactly where they are with better records and inventorying." She continued, "A memorable moment that brought everyone to tears was the day when one of our older volunteers was sorting through photographs and came across a black and white photograph of her

(deceased) mother and three sisters standing in front of the Dennison Depot getting ready to work at the Depot's Salvation Army Servicemen's Canteen. She had never seen the photograph before. Now she comes to volunteer in collections all the time, because, as the volunteer, said "our collection is full of hidden treasures that we need to make available for all visitors - and family members for whose history we are now the caretakers." For the museums' younger high school age interns, there was an overall enthusiasm, interest and surprising joy that, according to one, "old things can actually be pretty interesting."

If you're in Dennison or Uhrichsville, stop by to see museums' neatly organized storage areas - as well as their exhibits of the area's history: dennisondepot.org. "Like" them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/DennisonRailroadDepotMuseum and find them on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/DennisonDepot>. ■