

Project Abstract

The F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections at North Park University requests funds for the project **Preserving the Swedish-American Immigrant Experience**. Funds will improve our ability to preserve and provide access to our unique audiovisual resources. These resources contain significant documentation of the Swedish-American immigrant history including neighborhood videos from the early twentieth century and historical and cultural insights into religious responses to refugees, immigration, and other historical events. Grants funds will be used to contract with experts from the Chicago Film Archives to 1) conduct an assessment of our entire audiovisual collection, 2) create a detailed technical inventory of our film collection that will guide future preservation efforts, 3) recommend the purchase preservation supplies, and 4) conduct a workshop that will offer education and training related to film preservation to other archivists in Chicago and the surrounding areas. This workshop will equip and empower general archivists to better steward film resources.

What activities would the grant support?

This grant will fund four distinct activities that are all vital to the preservation of the audiovisual collection held at the F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections at North Park University.

Assessment

The first activity completed with grant support will be a general preservation assessment with experts from the Chicago Film Archives (CFA). An expert from the CFA will review our audiovisual collections and current storage solutions and make detailed recommendations for further care of the collection. Our audiovisual collection includes films; videotapes on a variety of magnetic tape media including UMATIC, Beta, and VHS; open reel audio recordings, and audiocassette collections. Having a general preservation assessment would both guide future preservation actions as well as provide user communities with more details about when we can provide access to these resources.

Technical Inventory

Secondly, an expert from the CFA will create a complete and detailed inventory of our film collection. This inventory will include, when possible: dates of production, film gauge, approximate length of each reel, whether the reel is silent or sound, color or black and white, any signs of warping or viewable deterioration, as well as title and label information. This technical information will be added to our existing inventory and will inform future preservation efforts.

Preservation Supplies

This grant will also fund the purchase of supplies relevant to the preservation of our audiovisual collections. Preliminary discussions with the Chicago Film Archives indicate that the supplies need will likely include polypropylene film cans and cores as well as film leader, tape, canned air and gloves. This list will be updated and finalized by an expert from the CFA following the technical inventory.

Professional Development

Finally, this grant will fund a professional development workshop where experts from the Chicago Film Archives could share best practices for handling audiovisual material with the other archivists in Chicago and the surrounding area. This workshop will allow staff as well as student workers at the F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections to begin to care for film materials. Additionally, because many other archives and cultural heritage institutions face similar challenges when dealing with audiovisual material, we will invite up to thirty staff, students, and volunteers from neighboring organizations and institutions to this workshop. This invitation will be extended through existing professional networks such as the Chicago Area Archivists group, the Chicago Collections Consortium, Dominican University's Library Science Program, and the Information School at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign.

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

The F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collection located at North Park University in Chicago holds materials in a variety of formats including published and unpublished print materials, photographs, serials, newspapers, art and artifacts, and audiovisual materials.

This project will focus on a collection of audiovisual materials that are unique but are currently inaccessible to researchers, educators, and the public. The highest priority audiovisual materials are the approximately five hundred recordings on 16mm film that are minimally processed and beginning to show signs of deterioration. We also hold over a thousand films on a variety of magnetic tape media including UMATIC, Beta, and VHS formats. We also hold approximately two thousand audio cassette tapes. None of this media content is currently stored in archival containers and most of this material is not available to the public.

Highlights of the film collection include:

- Footage from the Swedish Pioneer Centennial Celebration from 1948 (1 reel) – Recordings from the 1948 event that featured President Truman, the prince of Sweden, the poet Carl Sandburg and many other Swedish Americans. This event was held in the Chicago stadium and attracted more than 18,000 people.
- Home videos from the Austin Neighborhood of Chicago (2 reels) – These videos were recorded by an unknown photographer and show life in the Austin neighborhood in the 1930s, including women dancing in Swedish clothing.
- Amateur Film from the Mission Fields in Africa (15 reels) – Videos of daily life in African villages as well as wildlife.
- “Where Faith and Learning Meet” – North Park President Karl Olsson talks about Chicago and the North River Commission – a nonprofit community organization on the northwest side of Chicago.
- “Cupola Raising” – A short film with the raising of a renovated cupola on North Park University’s Old Main. Old Main is on the national register of historical places and the cupola was a landmark for pilots to locate Orchard Field – now O’Hare International Airport.
- “Strangers at Our Door” – Focused on Vietnamese refugees; features Vietnamese refugees telling their stories as well as responses to refugees by American families.
- “Alaska Bible Camp” – documents Covenant Bible Camp in Unalakleet, Alaska that serves native Alaskan youth.

The most noteworthy resource in our audio collection is the Dorothy Vann Collection of Oral Histories that spans 53 cassette tapes. Dorothy Vann lived and worked in the North Park neighborhood and recorded oral histories from 1977-1996. Vann interviewed people in the North Park and Albany Park neighborhoods to get glimpses into the history of the neighborhood. Given the ethnic character of this neighborhood, these interviews provide glimpses into Swedish life in Chicago from 1900 to 1970.

How are these collections used?

At present, the majority of our audiovisual collections are not being used because our institution lacks format specific knowledge to make these resources available to the various communities we serve. For example, we have not been able to fulfill a reference request for a researcher looking for a lecture given by a North Park faculty member on Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg because we currently lack information about the condition of the audiocassette tape and don’t want to risk permanent damage.

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However, this grant will be an important first step to making these resources available to the communities we currently serve as well as creating additional points of connections with audiences such as the Swedish American Museum, the Chicago Historical Society, various cultural organizations and the general public. This grant will strengthen the F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collection's commitment to education, research, and public programming.

Education

Located on the North Park University campus, the archives frequently serves both undergraduate and graduate students for class visits and tours. For example, ungraduated students in a public history course currently use archival collections to research buildings on campus and learn more about how buildings are added to the national register of historic places. These resources currently include historical photographs, blueprints, and correspondence. Making audiovisual materials related to the built campus environment as well as oral histories of the Albany Park and North Park neighborhood accessible would enhance this educational programming. Furthermore, enhancing the archive's ability to provide audiovisual resources creates opportunities for educational experiences that transcend normal limitations and could allow for creative re-use of primary source materials. For example, videos of building dedications could be juxtaposed with current videos or a segment from an oral history could be enhanced with historical photographs or used as part of a neighborhood walking tour. Graduate students at North Park's Theological Seminary currently use our collections to research the history of the Evangelical Covenant Church with topics ranging from immigration, racial change and integration, and responses to various social issues.

Research and Publication

The educational reach of the articles stretches far beyond North Park University; our collections meet the diverse research needs from elementary school students to international scholars. Over the last few years, the F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections has hosted a variety of researchers, including: a sixth-grade student researching Henry Palmblad and Swedish Covenant Hospital, a senior high student researching the Swedish Pioneer Centennial Celebration and the origins of the Swedish-American historical society, an undergraduate student studying Swedish Opera Singer Jenny Lind, researchers from Uppsala University in Sweden researching language contact and shift in the Swedish-American networks.

This list of researchers is representative of the diverse user communities and research interest and is not exhaustive. Recent publications that involved intensive archival research and resources include: *Denominational Higher Education During World War II* by John J. Laukaitis (2019), *Swedish Chicago* by Anita Gustafson (2019), *Norwegians and Swedes in the United States: Friends & Neighbors* edited by Philip J. Anderson and Dag Blanck (2011). A main focus for our parent institution has been to embrace Chicago based research. By better caring for our collections, the archives can better support researched interested in Chicago and regional history.

Public Programming

Finally, the F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections supports public engagement with archival resources through programming and exhibitions. The Commission on Covenant History, the official connection between the archives and the Evangelical Covenant Church, has planned and hosted three historically focused events over the last few years. The events included lectures on Swedish Theologian Paul Petter Waldenström, Pietism and Higher Education, and the Reformation. Last summer, North Park University hosted the world premiere of a documentary on the history of Pietism.

In 2016, the F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections collaborated with the Center for Scandinavian Studies, the Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation, and the Swedish-American Historical

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Society for a public exhibit and day-long symposium on the history of St. Ansgarius Episcopal Church. This church is significant to both the city of Chicago and Scandinavian American history as the first Swedish church in Chicago and for the role it played in the fledgling immigrant community. The F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections has a strong tradition of stewarding collections in ways that support public use and for partnering with other organizations. This grant will help us in that mission.

What is the nature and mission of your institution?

The F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections is the official repository of North Park University and the Evangelical Covenant Church of America. In collaboration with the Swedish-American Historical Society, the Archives also holds the Swedish-American Archives of Greater Chicago that documents the Swedish-American experience in Chicago. Our collection of audiovisual materials includes materials from all three institutions. The mission of the F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections is two-fold: to provide access to the collections and to ensure they remain available in the years to come. The archives is open to the public each weekday from 9am to 5pm and by appointment on the weekends. Currently, we have one full time staff member, two student workers working a combined 15 hours per week, and one volunteer working roughly 15 hours per week.

North Park University's history and heritage reach back to 1891, when the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant College and Seminary offered classes in language and business to give Swedish immigrants the skills needed to prosper in America. Since 1893, North Park University (NPU) has been located on Chicago's North Side, in a neighborhood that is now Albany Park and one of the most diverse zip codes in the nation. The mission of North Park University is to prepare students for lives of significance and service through education in the liberal arts, professional studies, and theology. As a faith-based, intercultural and urban University, NPU actively engages students at all levels of study and all disciplines in Chicago's vibrant neighborhoods and openly welcomes students of all backgrounds.

North Park University currently enrolls approximately 1900 undergraduate students and 1200 graduate, adult, and seminary students. NPU has an increasingly diverse undergraduate student body; once a primarily residential college composed of students affiliated with the Evangelical Covenant Church with Swedish roots, commuter students from Chicago and surrounding suburbs now comprise 59% of the undergraduate student population. For the 2017-2018 academic year, 44% of the total undergraduate population are Pell Grant recipients, 34% of incoming freshman are Latino and the percentage of undergraduates self-identifying as a member of a minority ethnic group is over 49%. It is expected that North Park University will be eligible to receive designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution in 2020.

North Park's parent institution, The Evangelical Covenant Church, was founded by Swedish Immigrants in 1885 and is currently a multiethnic movement of 875 congregations in the United States and Canada with ministries on five continents of the world.

The mission of the Swedish-American Archives of Greater Chicago (SAAGC) is to support the activities and goals of the Swedish-American Historical Society and North Park University by identifying, collecting, preserving and making accessible the documentary record of the Swedish-American community in Chicago.

Has your institution ever had a preservation or conservation assessment or consultation?

To the best of our knowledge, the F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections has never had a general preservation assessment or consultation. In 2016, the archives secured grants from the Swedish Council of America and the Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation to conserve and digitize the records from St.

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Ansgarius Episcopal Church. The digitized records are available online:
http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/npu_ansgar.

What is the importance of this project to your institution?

This project is critically important; without help from preservation specialists and failing to address the unique preservation challenges of audiovisual materials we risk failing to fulfill our core mission of to provide access to the collections and to ensure they remain available in the years to come. The National Endowment for the Humanities Preservation Assistance Grant will allow the F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections to assess the preservation needs of this collection and take steps to ensure that the long-term survival of this collection and promote public use and access.

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

Andy Meyer, director of the F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections, will lead this project. He will coordinate the collection assessment, order the supplies recommended by experts at the Chicago Film Archives. He will also plan, market, and coordinate the professional development workshop. He holds masters in Library Science with a focus in archives and special collections and is currently pursuing the digital archivist certification from the Society of American Archivists.

Brian Belak is the Collections Manager and Client Services Director for the Chicago Film Archives. In that role, he manages the processing and preservation storage of 130 audiovisual collections, inspects audiovisual materials and rehouses in new containers, and conducts on-site assessments of audiovisual collections.

What is the plan of work for the project?

September-December 2019

- Consult with experts from CFA for a general preservation assessment of our audiovisual materials and develop a detailed preservation plan for audiovisual collections.
- Experts from CFA will create a detailed technical inventory of our film collection.
- Begin to plan and market the professional development workshop with facilitator from the Chicago Film Archives and partner organizations.

January-March 2020

- Purchase preservation supplies and equipment.
- Host on-site training with experts from the Chicago Film Archives to train local staff and partners from neighboring institutions about best practices for handling audiovisual materials.

March – June 2020

- Rehouse film collections using preservation supplies and equipment provided by the grant following the best practices outlined by experts from the Chicago Film Archives.
- Implement recommendations from the general preservation assessment for the other audiovisual collections.