

New Eyes on Alice Austen: Redesigning the Museum's Permanent Installation

A. Abstract

The Alice Austen House (AAH), the only museum dedicated to a woman photographer in the United States, requests \$400,000 for a Historic Places implementation grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for the project *New Eyes on Alice Austen: Redesigning the Museum's Permanent Installation* to better contextualize, expand, and update the presentation of the core story of early American photographer, Alice Austen (1866-1952). Guided by a team of five prominent scholars, AAH will engage a professional exhibition designer to incorporate current scholarship into re-envisioning the permanent installation at the historic house museum to more comprehensively demonstrate Austen's contributions to photographic, immigration, women's and LGBTQ history. The new permanent installation would be unveiled to the public in March 2019 during Women's History Month.

B. Nature of Request

The Alice Austen House (AAH), the only museum dedicated to a woman photographer in the United States, requests \$400,000 for a Historic Places implementation grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for the project *New Eyes on Alice Austen: Redesigning the Museum's Permanent Installation* to better contextualize, expand, and update the presentation of the core story of early American photographer Alice Austen (1866-1952). This project builds upon work accomplished through the museum's 2015 NEH planning grant for which AAH convened a prestigious team of scholars to advise the museum about incorporating current scholarship into the museum's interpretation of Austen's life and work for the public. With further support from the NEH, the Alice Austen House will implement planning strategies by engaging a professional exhibition designer and utilizing the high resolution photographs available today to update the permanent installation, which has remained largely unchanged since the historic house museum's opening in 1985.

The scope of the redesign will include rethinking the use of the entry hall to improve the visitor orientation space; reassessing the presentation of two period rooms, a formal parlor and dining room; incorporating historical material into two modernized gallery spaces used for contemporary photography exhibitions; reimagining Alice Austen's upstairs darkroom to include a learning space about the technical aspects of photography; and incorporating the significant waterfront grounds of the historic house into the visitor experience. The implementation project will include updating the museum's website to share the new interpretive content with a global audience. The permanent installation redesign will be guided by the team of five prominent scholars – Lillian Faderman, Sarah Gillespie, Richard Meyer, Lara Vapnek, and Laura Wexler – and the thesis statements grounded in humanities content that were collectively drafted as the result of the planning grant. The new permanent installation would be unveiled to the public in March 2019 during Women's History Month.

Alice Austen is a fascinating historical figure whose story bears relevance to issues we still face in society. Austen's life story and photography represent broader themes in urban and immigration history, women's and gender studies, LGBTQ history, and photographic and art history that can be better explored, examined, and presented through the public museum for today's audiences. This project will fill gaps in the museum's current permanent exhibition which does not adequately communicate Alice Austen's significance as an important American photographer and her professional ambitions. A primary aspect of the permanent exhibition redesign will be to make more visible the loving and devoted relationship of Alice Austen and Gertrude Tate to reflect their life lived together at

the home for 30 of their more than 50 year relationship. Austen's photographs of 20th century immigration processes and her historical lesbian relationship pertain to the NEH initiative, *The Common Good: The Humanities in the Public Square*, as these thematic explorations are relevant to the current state of immigration and LGBTQ rights. Austen's story and photographs provide educational opportunities and stimulate dialogue for today's audiences about conditions faced by those entering the country and establishing themselves as immigrants, and about tolerance, acceptance, and equality with respect to sexual orientation.

The scholars were in agreement that the concept of 'home' would serve as an organizing principle for the interpretive content to communicate: 1) the significance of the long architectural history of the home that dates back to 1690, 2) the unconventional Victorian household in which Alice Austen was raised that encouraged her independence in becoming a 'New Woman', 3) the precariousness of a woman-run household as Alice Austen and Gertrude Tate tried to sustain themselves following the 1929 stock market crash, 4) the site as the backdrop of thousands of Alice Austen's photographs of her family, friends, harbor views and staged tableaux, and 5) Austen's point of departure to explore New York City and the world beyond.

C. Humanities Context

Born in 1866 on Staten Island, Alice Austen made significant contributions through her life and photographs to New York City and United States history, women's and feminist history, and photographic and art history. Austen's photographs show us street and private life through the lens of a compelling woman whose life spanned from the end of the Civil War to the Cold War. Alice Austen was a trailblazer – a rebel who broke away from the constraints of her Victorian environment and forged an independent life that broke boundaries of acceptable female behavior and social rules. Additionally, her family's home, Clear Comfort, now the museum, shaped Alice Austen's experiences, served as her first studio space and darkroom, and opened up to her a world of subjects beyond her comfortable, upper-middle class suburban existence. Purchased by Alice Austen's grandfather John Haggerty Austen in 1844, the family took great pride in the house and it was known in the 19th century as the "first house on the left" entering America due to its prominent waterfront site on the north shore of Staten Island at the entrance of New York Harbor. This vantage point influenced Alice Austen's work, as the location allowed Alice to witness many historical events, including the construction of the Statue of Liberty, the last voyage of the Lusitania, and the successive waves of immigrants arriving in New York City.

As part of an NEH planning grant, the scholar team and staff of the Alice Austen House arrived at essential knowledge statements that will guide the redesign of the physical spaces and interpretive content of the historic house's permanent installation:

Both in the subjects that she photographed and the way she lived her life, Alice Austen was a New Woman who questioned gender roles and challenged the conventions of Victorian society.

The late 19th century phenomenon of the New Woman, a term coined in 1894 by writer Sarah Grand in her article "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" and popularized in the novels of the American author Henry James, described a growing number of financially independent women who valued self-fulfillment and benefited from greater professional and educational opportunities. Alice Austen was raised in an unconventional Victorian home where she was encouraged to explore her own interests rather than adhere to traditional Victorian women's roles of marriage and motherhood. Alice Austen was handed her first camera at age 11, and thereafter had the economic means and leisure time to

become a serious, dedicated practitioner of photography. She took advantage of the increased mobility afforded by relaxation in women's dress, the participation of women in sport (particularly the early days of tennis), the bicycling craze, and new forms of transportation such as the train and the automobile. With her camera, Austen documented the connection between women's physical mobility and their personal freedom. Austen mocked social conventions for both men and women by photographing herself and her friends cross-dressing, and posing same-sex and mixed-sex groups in outlandish scenarios. Her close friends were independent-minded women who engaged in professional activities. Austen's friend Violet Ward published a nearly 200 page technical treatise on bicycles for a female audience, entitled *Bicycling for Ladies* (1896). The model for the illustrations in Violet's book, Daisy Elliott, was a gymnast and managed a gym in Manhattan. Austen's partner, Gertrude Tate, was part of the Progressive wave of education in the late 19th century, working as a kindergarten and dance teacher in Brooklyn.

The independence and professional ambitions of Alice Austen, her friends, and her companion Gertrude Tate will be used to demonstrate that the powerful cultural symbol of the New Woman arose from the bold actions of real women. The scholarship on Alice Austen and her intimate circle of friends will contribute to historical studies situating the New Woman within her broader economic and cultural context. The photographs of Alice Austen will be presented as important visual records that contribute to our understanding of feminist history in New York at the turn of the 20th century.

Alice Austen has been considered an amateur photographer, but her activities and mastery of the craft were of professional caliber in the field regarding the technical aspects of photography, as well as her taking initiative to copyright, exhibit, and publish her work.

Alice Austen learned the technical aspects of glass plate photography at a young age, mastered the chemistry involved in developing pictures, set up a darkroom at Clear Comfort in a hallway closet, and used the grounds of her home as her studio. She purchased multiple, expensive, high quality cameras and lenses, glass plates which varied in size, and flash powder. She meticulously recorded shutter speeds, light conditions, lenses, distance from her subjects, and other relevant information that could help her improve as a photographer. She continued her commitment to practicing glass plate photography long after new, easier to operate cameras and film had been invented. Over the course of forty years she photographed more than 7,000 images, and copyrighted 150 of her images with the Library of Congress.

Alice Austen's technical mastery of photography will be used to introduce a 21st century audience to the processes of 19th century photography, as well as the broader history of photography from the late 19th to the early 20th century. Alice Austen's photographic activity will be linked to the rapidly expanded interest in photography in the second half of the 19th century that led to amateurs picking up cameras, and a market for do-it-yourself manuals and commercially produced dry plates. Austen's darkroom will be used as an educational space to demonstrate the chemistry involved in developing a photographic plate. The physicality of 19th century photography will be communicated through view cameras of various sizes, and the size of Austen's original prints will be explained by the size of her negatives. Examples of Austen's work published in photographic journals such as *Camera Mosaics* and *Photo American Review*, as well as further research into Austen's membership in local camera clubs, will contribute to the knowledge of women photographers' participation in amateur photographic societies, publications, and exhibitions at the end of the 19th century.

Alice Austen was one of the earliest female street photographers and the first woman photographer to document immigration in New York.

Alice Austen's photographs are visual artifacts of a woman navigating city streets and encountering the new wave of immigrants that populated lower Manhattan. In the 1890s, Alice Austen traveled into Manhattan to photograph people on the street, often the working class and immigrants, and in 1896, she published a portfolio of this work with the Albotype Company titled *Street Types of New York*. That same year, Austen received a commission at the request of Doctor Alvah H. Doty of the U.S. Public Health Service to photograph the quarantine station on Hoffman and Swinburne Islands, located off the coast of Staten Island near the Austen family home. She returned year after year, creating a record of the equipment and procedures of the station, the life of immigrants, and technical advances in disease eradication. A selection of these images was exhibited at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York in 1901, and published in *Harper's Weekly Magazine* in 1896 and *Medical Record* in 1912.

Austen's photographs will be used to discuss the history of "new immigration" at the turn of the 20th century, a contemporary term that was used to describe the waves of newcomers arriving from Southern and Eastern Europe from the period immediately following the Civil War extending up until the 1920s. Austen's impulse to document these newcomers and her intimate connection with her subjects will be compared to the motivations and images of other documentarians such as Jacob Riis, Augustus Sherman, and Lewis Hine. Austen's *Street Types* will be contextualized by situating her work within a larger culture of illustrations, newspapers, magazines, and the theater that attempted to visually define and characterize the new immigrants. Austen's photographs of the quarantine stations of Hoffman and Swinburne islands will contribute to the lesser known story of new immigrants, particularly children, en route to Ellis Island who were removed from the ships in the outer harbor of the port of New York by the New York State Medical Inspectors and transferred to these two hospitals, often to die of the contagious illnesses that quarantined them.

Alice Austen and Gertrude Tate's loving and committed historical relationship is significant to representing LGBTQ history and inspiring to today's LGBTQ community.

Alice Austen and Gertrude Tate met in 1899, formed a loving and devoted relationship, built a life together, and supported one another for more than 50 years, living together at Clear Comfort for 30 years. The most apt description of Alice Austen and Gertrude Tate's relationship is "Boston Marriage." The term was coined by American author Henry James in his 1886 novel, *The Bostonians*, to describe the intimate relationship of two wealthy unmarried Bostonian women. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the term was used to describe two single women living together, independent of men. The commonly-asked visitor question, "Were Alice and Gertrude lesbians?," warrants an answer beyond a simple 'yes' or 'no.' Because of the stigma placed upon homosexuality at the time, the intimate details of these "marriages" are lacking, but "Boston marriages" allowed independent, intellectually-driven women to have the careers they desired, making the arrangement a historically important step toward gender equality. In the case of Alice and Gertrude, their rejection of romantic heterosexual attachments, the disapproval of Gertrude's family of Alice and Gertrude's "wrong devotion" to one another, and their determination to build a life together, all contribute to our understanding of their relationship as a loving and committed partnership that is meaningful as the LGBTQ community still strives for equality even in light of legal achievements such as gay marriage.

Given the museum's history of criticism for lack of acknowledgement of Alice and Gertrude as a couple, the scholars agreed that it will be important to use the term lesbian to provide a current context to the

relationship, as that is how we would consider their relationship by today's terms, even though Alice and Gertrude would not have referred to themselves as lesbians since during their time the term had a derogatory, class-based connotation. The educational opportunity and challenge for the museum in the updated interpretation is to represent Alice and Gertrude's relationship in a forthcoming manner that they were a couple, yet handle the subject with great sensitivity and nuance given the historical context.

The Alice Austen House will contribute to our knowledge of lesbian and gay history by using Alice and Gertrude's relationship to explore the complexities of a Boston marriage, understand the changing definition of lesbianism, and explore the historical construction of sexuality and sexual identity. The biographical details of Alice and Gertrude's life demonstrate their economic struggles to support a household and the precariousness of their situation as a same-sex couple not afforded the rights, protections, and benefits of married couples. While Alice and Gertrude's relationship on the whole presents a positive historical example, their story represents a more tragic side as well that addresses common struggles for LGBTQ couples. After losing their beloved home, Gertrude went to live with her family, however Alice was presumably not welcomed and needed greater health care than Gertrude could provide. Alice Austen ultimately declared an oath of poverty and was admitted to the New York Farm Colony, Staten Island's poorhouse. Gertrude outlived Alice by 10 years; Alice and Gertrude had wished to be buried next to each other, however that wish was not granted by the family and Gertrude was buried in the family plot in Brooklyn, whereas Alice is buried on Staten Island.

D. Project Formats and Participant Experience

Working with a professional exhibition designer to re-envision the permanent installation in the museum, the Alice Austen House will activate the historic house as the lively environment that it was when the Austens lived there in the late 19th and into the 20th century. Using Austen's historic photographs to frame views and vignettes of the interior spaces, the museum will encourage visitor participation in seeing and understanding the house "through Alice Austen's eyes."

Using the concept of "home" as the organizing principle, visitors will learn about Alice Austen's life, home and work with Clear Comfort as the starting place and building outward, much as Austen's life and work broadened from her base in Staten Island to branching out to Manhattan and beyond. The exhibition design will be organized into three sections: "Her Life", "Her Home," and "Her Work."

As described in the attached Walkthrough, exterior interpretive signage will serve to first orient visitors as they approach the museum, since the house is a historic site in a public park that is in a residential neighborhood. The signs will resolve the issue of the public being unclear that the home is a public museum rather than a private residence and will provide information about the significance of the historic grounds and location as integral to the understanding of the house and Austen's influences.

Alice Austen House takes pride in the fact that the museum allows visitors to walk freely through the historic home rather than restricting access to guided tours. The new permanent installation will be based upon a process of discovery of the home wherein visitors may experience the house at their own pace. The goal will be to retain the intimate feeling of entering a home (rather than an institution) while providing greater access to content so that more information can be communicated through a self-guided approach rather than relying on guided tours to reveal a more complete picture.

Alice Austen's photographs will serve as the primary means of representing the humanities themes through her visual record of urban portraits of immigrant workers and quarantine images that documenting immigration, staged photos that question gender roles, and intimate images of her partner Gertrude Tate. The images will be contextualized and supported by didactic text and image captions to clarify what is represented in the photographs. The interpretive text will be well grounded in scholarly concepts while remaining accessible to the general public.

Original photographic prints and objects will be utilized when possible, depending on condition and exposure. One of the great challenges to the historic house is the lack of climate control. As part of the redesign, the museum will acquire new archival display cases within which a micro-climate can be created for display of original photographs and materials in the proper environment. Interpretive text panels will incorporate the high-resolution reproductions of Austen's images that are now available through digitization efforts, replacing the low quality images that are currently on exhibition and outdated and outmoded.

In addition to the main interpretive panels, historic room markers will provide a sub-layer of information about "Her Home" using historical photos to communicate the rooms' period usage and significance. Media elements will also be incorporated into the experience as appropriate and in a sensitive manner within the historic house in order to make additional layers of information and further images accessible to visitors in a small space. Video will be important to utilize film material that includes primary interviews with historian Oliver Jensen who 'discovered' Austen's photographs in 1950 and Ann Novotny, his researcher and Austen's primary biographer.

To align with the new interpretation presented within the museum, the final interpretive text panels pertaining to Austen's life, home and work will be used to update and expand the content available on the museum's website, currently viewed by 33,000 annual visitors worldwide.

E. Project Resources

The Walkthrough supplemental provides visual examples of Austen's photographs that will be incorporated in the permanent installation to address the outlined humanities themes. AAH will draw upon the Alice Austen House's collection (see description below) and include materials from other institutional collections. AAH has a working relationship with the Staten Island Historical Society that has a substantial collection of Austen's photographs and archival materials (i.e. 3,500 items) and will work with SIHS to license the use of images for the permanent installation. Additionally, the redesign will incorporate images from the Library of Congress, where Alice Austen registered 150 of her photographs, and there are a number of items at New York Public Library and other collections that may be licensed for use. Public domain photographs by other early American and women photographers that were contemporaries of Austen – including Francis Benjamin Johnston, Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine – will be utilized to provide comparison and context to Austen's work.

AAH Collection

The Alice Austen House holds a collection of original Alice Austen photographs and artifacts, including: glass plate negatives, photographic prints, photo albums compiled by Alice Austen, original cameras and photography equipment used by Alice Austen, and Austen family artifacts, such as historic furnishings and decorative items. The collection includes one of Austen's 4x5 bellows camera, a pocket Kodak box camera, a developing kit, and envelopes for her glass plate negatives with Alice's inscription regarding

the mechanical specifications of exposures. The 1890s formal parlor and dining room have been recreated with both original objects belonging to the Austen family and period pieces carefully selected based on the detailed photos by Alice Austen of the rooms in the house. The museum's collection also includes publications featuring Alice Austen's work, including: Austen's 1896 *Street Types Portfolio*; an issue of *Camera Mosaics* from 1894; a first edition of *Bicycling for Ladies* (1896) with illustrations based on Austen's photos; an 1898 issue of *Harper's Weekly Magazine* featuring five of Austen's photographs of the quarantine station; and the September 24, 1951 issue of *Life Magazine* with a full spread on the photographer highlighting several of Alice Austen's images.

F. Project History

AAH's Executive Director and Board of Directors are committed to updating the museum's interpretation to become more expansive and inclusive. In June 2014, the museum completed a major exterior restoration project, funded through a Partners in Preservation grant through the National Trust for Historic Preservation and American Express, which included replacing rotten wood, restoring ornamental woodwork, and exterior painting. The outside of the house has been refreshed; now the interior needs attention through the updating of the permanent installation.

With the Board of Directors' approval, the organizational mission statement was updated in December 2014 to include the phrase "exploring personal identity." The new mission statement (see Organizational Profile) represents a significant step forward for an organization that has historically been criticized for the lack of acknowledgement of Alice and Gertrude's relationship. In the 1980s, the Lesbian Avengers, a lesbian activist group, publicly protest the institution's non-acknowledgement of the photographer's relationship with Gertrude, chanting, "Alice and Gertrude were lesbians, and we are as well." In 1998, the artist Barbara Hammer produced a film, *The Female Closet*, which discussed Alice Austen as a lesbian, and openly criticized the museum's board for covering up her sexuality. As late as 2005, photo historian Peter Bacon Hales included in his notes for the section on Alice Austen in his book *Silver Cities: Photographing American Urbanization, 1839-1939* that Austen's life "has been transformed by the historiography of lesbian/gay studies and queer theory; her most famous photograph today probably isn't one of those made in the city, but a double-couple portrait of women embracing [*The Darned Club*]" (p. 497). In a day and age of transparency and open dialogue, the museum needs to right its past and fully embrace the significance of Alice and Gertrude's pioneering relationship to LGBTQ history, particularly in light of social advances with marriage equality and gay rights.

The Alice Austen House is committed to incorporating Alice Austen and Gertrude Tate's lesbian relationship into the house's core interpretation of the historic home, which is still rare territory for historic houses. Other historic sites have recently made efforts to include LGBTQ readings, including the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum in Chicago, which undertook an alternative labeling project to acknowledge Hull's relationship with Mary Rozet-Smith. Beauport (The Sleeper-McCann House) in Gloucester, Massachusetts and the Sarah Orne Jewett House in South Berwick Maine, both part of Historic New England, have also broached the LGBTQ subjects of their sites. AAH regards bringing Alice Austen and Gertrude Tate's relationship to the forefront as an opportunity to be a leader in this area to represent LGBTQ history when it is largely excluded, even if long overdue.

In May 2014, the National Park Service (NPS) announced a new theme study to identify sites of importance to LGBTQ history. Through the support of Historic House Trust, AAH Executive Director Janice Monger attended the launch event at the Department of the Interior in Washington, DC on June

10, 2014. The Alice Austen House has submitted a formal request through this initiative for amendment of its National Register of Historic Places listing to include this special LGBTQ designation. Subsequently, the Alice Austen House will be recommended for LGBTQ designation under this initiative through a grant-funded project led by Andrew Dolkart, professor of Historic Preservation at the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP), who will author the expanded National Register description of the site as part of the grant work.

In August 2015, the Alice Austen House was awarded a \$35,000 NEH planning grant to create a more inclusive and expansive interpretation of Alice Austen's compelling personal story and photographs grounded in scholarly analysis and framed within several relevant contexts: New York City history and urban development; immigration history; women's and feminist issues; LGBTQ and gender studies; and photographic and art history. Scholars chosen for their achievements in these fields convened at the museum in November 2015 and March 2016. Through these meetings, the scholars were able to experience the museum first-hand to advise AAH on the content and visuals for updated and expanded interpretive content that form the basis for the proposed overhaul to the permanent installation.

On March 31, 2016, the scholars presented their findings in a roundtable discussion at the Whitney Museum of American Art to a sold-out audience of 200 people. Each scholar selected a theme relevant to Austen's body of work. Sarah Gillespie spoke about Austen's particular take on street photography; Lara Vapnek focused on how the mobility of the "New Woman" offered opportunities to Austen; Lillian Faderman addressed the partnership between Austen and Gertrude Tate as a marriage even if the legal option did not exist for them; Laura Wexler explored Austen's work on the quarantine as it relates to the larger context of immigration and her interest in science and technology; and Richard Meyer investigated the afterlife of Austen's imagery in context of contemporary LGBTQ movements. A lively hour-long question and answer session followed the presentations, affirming interest in Austen.

The Alice Austen House was also recently awarded a \$50,000 grant from the Henry J. Luce Foundation to support cataloging and digitizing of the Alice Austen House collection. This project will enable the museum to create item level records with images in a searchable database for the primary photography and archival collections. Cataloguing will ensure proper and thorough documentation that will aid tremendously in preparations to utilize the collections in undertaking the project of revamping the permanent installation.

With the completion of the scholarly planning and the preparation of the collections that will be addressed in the next few months, the museum is ready to move into implementing the redesign of the museum's core interpretation.

H. Audience, Marketing, and Promotion

The Alice Austen House currently serves 17,850 in-person visitors annually, including 2,600 students through the museum's education programs. Additionally, the museum's website attracts 33,000 unique viewers annually. The museum serves mostly a local population, with 45% of museum visitors from Staten Island and 28% from the NYC metro area, 11% domestic visitors, and 15% international. Through recent initiatives to expand its audience, the museum serves a diverse population and has seen a 55%

increase in minority visitors between 2014 and 2015, which is more reflective of the demographics of Staten Island, particularly the museum's immediate neighborhood.¹

The Alice Austen House strongly promotes its exhibitions and programs through a multiple-channel communication plan, which includes digital and print outreach. A seasonal public programs brochure published three times per year serves as a central marketing tool and is distributed to 5,000 households. The museum issues press releases and frequently receives coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Staten Island Advance*, as well as in a number of art and photography blogs and periodicals. The museum's own social media following is strong, with 5,000 "Likes" on Facebook. The museum issues bi-weekly e-blasts to a mailing list of 5,000 people. Additionally, the museum's website is constantly updated with events, news, and content. Alice Austen House is also part of collaborative marketing efforts with the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, NYC Go (the city's tourism agency), and Governor Cuomo's Path Through History Initiative.

Specific events and initiatives, such as the NEH-funded "New Eyes on Alice Austen" public roundtable discussion at the Whitney Museum of American Art in March 2016, are promoted through a customized marketing plan to target specific audiences and demographics. These comprehensive and collaborated efforts resulted in a sold-out audience of 200 people. Video footage of the entire program is available online through both the Alice Austen House and Whitney Museum of American Art's websites, allowing for the program to be more widely distributed and continue to be viewed.

The goal for updating the interpretation at the house will be to better serve all visitors. According to a 2008 survey conducted by Reach Advisors of visitors to outdoor history museums, 95% of respondents thought that it was important for historic sites to include stories of different races and cultures in their interpretation.² Special initiatives will be undertaken expand the museum's content and reach under-served and under-represented audiences, especially the LGBTQ and local immigrant communities, to connect them with Alice's story empowering story. The Alice Austen House has a solid working relationship with several community groups, including the Staten Island Pride Center. Additional partnerships will strengthen the museum's relationships to local and national LGBTQ groups, women's organizations, bicycling clubs, and minority groups.

I. Project Evaluation

The NEH scholars team assembled for the planning grant will continue to serve as consultants throughout the implementation phase and will evaluate the final interpretative text and exhibition plan design for the permanent installation. Additionally, the Alice Austen House has created an advisory committee comprised of cultural and community members to provide a focus group of stakeholders

¹ According to the 2010 Census, Staten Island's residents comprise 64.0% non-Hispanic White, 17.3% Hispanic, 10.6% African American, and 7.5% Asian. The median income for a household is \$55,039, and the median income for a family was \$64,333 with about 7.9% of families and 10.0% of the population were below the poverty line. The museum's immediate neighborhood on the North Shore is low income and the museum serves schools such as PS 13, with 826 students (72% minority and 100% qualifying for the free or reduced lunch program). Source: "United State Census Quick Facts: Richmond County, New York". Census.gov.

² Reach Advisors, "Difficult Issues, Inclusive History," *Museum Audience Insight* (blog), July 8, 2008, http://reachadvisors.typepad.com/museum_audience_insight/2008/07/difficult-issues-inclusive-history.html

who will provide input and feedback on the presentation of the new interpretative content from both an expert and user perspective. The museum will seek input on the clarity of the presentation, understanding gained about the main themes from experiencing the installation, how the text supports the images, any gaps in content presented, and comments on the overall experience from the focus group participants. Advisory committee members include Ralph Vogel, Executive Director, Pride Center of Staten Island; Stephen Hilger, Photography Department Chair, Pratt Institute; Catherine Lavender, Associate Professor of History, College of Staten Island; Donald Moffett, Artist & Museum Supporter; Kamillah Hanks, Founder and President, Historic Tappen Park Community Partnership; and partner public school teachers, Jeanne Raleigh PS 19, 2nd grade and Tricia Walsh PS 60, 4-5th grade. The museum will also approach colleagues at the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn and the Tenement Museum in Manhattan for expert input. Experienced in program evaluation, Project Manager Denise Rompilla will structure a formal evaluation survey for input from the Advisory Committee in the design phase and feedback will be incorporated into the final design. Director of Public Engagement Shiloh Aderhold Holley will conduct a web survey and collect feedback from public tours on the visitor experience once the permanent installation has been open to the public.

J. Organizational Profile

The mission of the Alice Austen House is to foster creative expression, explore personal identity, and to educate and inspire the public through the interpretation of the photographs, life and historic home of early American photographer Alice Austen (1866-1952).

- Mission Statement revised and board approved on December 10, 2014

The Alice Austen House is the only museum devoted to a woman photographer in the United States, and one of very few preserved artist's homes and studios in New York City (along with Judd Foundation, Louise Bourgeois House and Chaim Gross Foundation). The Friends of Alice Austen House, Inc was formed in the 1960's when the house faced potential demolition. The Friends raised funds to save the house, convinced the city to acquire the property and obtained landmark status to make it a museum and a park open to the public. The Friends group included photographers Edward Steichen, Alfred Eisenstadt and Berenice Abbott; Grace Mayer of the Museum of Modern Art; historian Oliver Jensen; architect Philip Johnson; architectural historian Margot Gayle; and Regina Benedict of the *American Society of Magazine Photographers*.

In 1971, the Austen House was designated a New York City Landmark as a result of the efforts of the Friends group. The building was purchased by the City of New York and restored in the late 1970s-early 1980s. The museum opened to the public in 1985. In 1993, it became a National Historic Landmark. In 2002, AAH was inducted into the National Trust for Historic Preservation's distinguished group of Historic Artist Homes and Studios, in company with Georgia O'Keeffe, Grant Wood, Winslow Homer, Donald Judd, and Jackson Pollock-Lee Krasner.

Today, the Alice Austen House is a vibrant cultural center visited in person by 17,850 people annually; by 33,000 online visitors to the AAH website; and serving 2,600 students through the museum's education programs in schools and at the museum. The museum has a full time staff of 2, part-time staff of 7, and numerous volunteers. The annual operating budget is \$390,000 for FY2016 (January – December).

Connecting themes from Alice Austen's life and photography to contemporary concerns, the museum's changing exhibitions bring important photography exhibitions to visitors that offer unique perspective

on issues of immigration, feminism, urban development, and LGBTQ issues. In 2014, AAH presented *Invisible Migrations: recent work on immigration and global human migration*, with contemporary photography projects alongside Alice Austen's documentation of immigrants and quarantine stations. In 2016, the museum presented "Staten Island Unlimited: The Borough's First Triennial of Photography," which showcased the work of 35 contemporary photographers (from 200 entrants) living or working on Staten Island today and demonstrated the breadth and depth of the borough through images of its diverse people and natural and built environment. The museum's exhibitions have received acclaim in *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Photograph*, *Huffington Post* and other major publications.

Public Programs at Alice Austen House include Worldwide Pinhole Photography Day, where the public takes their own pinhole photographs and learn the math and science behind photography and Vintage Camera Day, a festival celebrating the history of photography through the evolution of the equipment and changing technologies. Alice Austen House regularly partners with other cultural organizations, including the Isadora Duncan Dance Company, Staten Island Philharmonic, and Open House New York, to host programs and events. Through in-school and on-site education programs, the museum provides local school children from kindergarten through high school opportunities to learn about history through the photographer's lens; about Alice Austen, her life and times in order to learn about local and women's history; and the art and science of photography.

K. Project Team - Staff

Project Director: Janice Monger, Executive Director

Janice Monger holds an MA in Visual Arts Administration from New York University. Since April 2013, she has served as Executive Director of the Alice Austen House. She was previously at the Brooklyn Historical Society for seven years, where as Associate Director, her responsibilities included overseeing the museum's exhibition program and visitor services operations. Ms. Monger will oversee the project and direct the project team and exhibition designers.

Project Assistant: Shiloh Aderhold Holley, Director of Public Engagement and Operations

Shiloh Aderhold Holley manages the public operations of the museum, overseeing visitor services, leading tours, and facilitating public programs. She holds an MA in Art History and Museum Studies from the University of Illinois at Chicago with a concentration on twentieth century decorative arts and architecture. She has been working in the museum sector since 2005, mostly with historic house museums. Mrs. Holley will assist with the management of research and collections materials and will advise the project team on visitor experience.

Project Participant: Ann Marie McDonnell, Director of Education

For the past ten years, Ann Marie McDonnell has provided AAH's education programs for students, including school group visits to the museum, in-school programs, summer camps and family workshops. Ms. McDonnell holds a Masters of Fine Arts from Brooklyn College. Ms. McDonnell will lend her expertise on the history of Alice Austen and the historic house and provide perspective on the proposed interpretation to improve the experience for the museum's significant student audience.

L. Humanities Scholars

Lillian Faderman is an internationally known scholar of lesbian history and literature, as well as ethnic history and literature. *The New York Times* named her books, *The Gay Revolution: Story of the Struggle* (2015), *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981) and *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (1991/2012), on its

"Notable Books of the Year" list. Lillian Faderman is Professor Emerita at Fresno State University, CA. Dr. Faderman will provide invaluable insight into Alice and Gertrude's relationship and how to contextualize the relationship historically while speaking to a modern audience.

Sarah Kate Gillespie is Curator of American Art at the Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia. She specializes in 19th and 20th century American visual culture, with an emphasis on the history of photography. She recently published, *"One Thing New Under the Sun:" Cross-Currents in the Early American Daguerreotype, 1839-51* (MIT Press). She is currently organizing a reinstallation of the permanent collection at the Georgia Museum of Art and an exhibition on early 20th century American photographer Doris Ulmann, scheduled for fall 2017. Dr. Gillespie will advise on Alice Austen's place in the history of early American photography.

Richard Meyer is the Robert and Ruth Halperin Professor in Art History at Stanford University and teaches courses in art history, curatorial practice and gender and sexuality studies. His book, *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*, was awarded the Charles C. Eldredge Prize for Outstanding Scholarship from the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Professor Meyer co-wrote with Catherine Lord, *Art and Queer Culture*, a survey focusing on the dialogue between visual art and non-normative sexualities from 1885 to the present. Professor Meyer gave a lecture on Alice Austen, titled "Quarantined: Alice Austen and the Secret History of Photography," in 2011 as part of the theme of Multiple Feminisms at Mildred Lane Kemper Museum at Washington University in St. Louis. He will provide crucial analysis of Austen's photographs with respect to queer culture and from an art historical perspective.

Lara Vapnek, Associate Professor of History at St. John's University, NY specializes in the history of gender and labor in the nineteenth and twentieth-century United States. Vapnek holds a PhD in History from Columbia University. Dr. Vapnek will offer perspectives on Alice Austen's contributions to the record of New York City history and provide insights into Austen's pursuit of photography as a near profession given her focus on labor and gender history.

Laura Wexler is Professor of American Studies, Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Co-Chair of the Women's Faculty Forum at Yale University. She chaired the Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program from 2003-2007. In her book, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (North Carolina Press: 2000), Wexler examines Alice Austen's photographs and presents an incisive analysis of how the first American female photojournalists contributed to a "domestic vision" that reinforced the imperialism and racism of turn-of-the-century America. Dr. Wexler will provide nuanced views on Austen's significance to women's studies, photographic history and American studies.

Consultants

Denise Rompilla, Project Manager

Denise Rompilla is a museum educator, art historian, and independent consultant for gallery and museum interpretation. Denise Rompilla holds a PhD in Art History and has worked in various positions in Adult Education at museums including the Morgan Library, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art. She previously curated an exhibition on Alice Austen and images of the "New Woman" at the Alice Austen House. As Project Manager, Dr. Rompilla will conduct thorough archival research; refine interpretive text; serve as the liaison between the scholar team, staff and

exhibition designer; ensure that the project is on course with timelines and budget; and conduct focus groups and project evaluation.

Paul Moakley, Curator

Bringing groundbreaking exhibitions to the Alice Austen House, Paul Moakley has curated exhibitions for the museum for the past twelve years, always with the intention of connecting Alice Austen to contemporary issues and photographers. Moakley is Deputy Director of Photography and Visual Enterprise for TIME. He is caretaker of the Alice Austen House and works with the museum as Curator on a consulting basis. Mr. Moakley will advise on the museum's interpretative plan and provide expert input based on his extensive curatorial and photo editing experience, intricate understanding of presenting exhibitions in the museum space, and knowledge of Alice Austen's body of work.

Coen Projekts (Nadia Coen and Sara Shabaka), Exhibition Designer

A woman-owned, NYC-based exhibition design firm, Coen Projekts focuses on experiential, immersive, and multidisciplinary interpretive design that will offer creative solutions for presenting content in a thoughtful and intuitive manner within the limited space of the historic house museum. Principal Nadia Coen has worked in the exhibition design field for over fifteen years, including with the reputed Ralph Appelbaum Associates. Coen Projekts will be contracted as the exhibition designer for the permanent installation to design all exhibition elements and manage all aspects of the fabrication and installation.

Archivist and Conservator: to be determined, will assist in preparations of original photographic prints and objects to assess exhibition conditions and light levels to ensure proper care of items on display. Consultants for these services are required as the museum does not have devoted collections staff.

Web Designer: AAH has worked with CHIPS, based in Brooklyn, for the museum's website, who have created a framework for the museum to self-update content, however the museum will need to retain CHIPS or a comparable web designer as necessary to implement the update to website content involving structural changes to the layout.

M. Work Plan

<u>Date</u>	<u>Tasks</u>	<u>Personnel</u>	<u>Time</u>
May 2017	1. Complete grant agreement paperwork with NEH. 2. Issue press release about grant award. 3. Sign contract with exhibition designer. 4. Convene staff meeting to review grant plan, outline staff assignments and create schedule of meetings.	Monger Rompilla Holley	40 Hours
Jun – Aug 2017	1. Meet with exhibition designer to review scope of redesign and work plan. 2. Project Manager and Alice Austen staff to conduct additional research using Alice Austen House archival materials, as well as the archival collections at the Staten Island Historical Society, and university, local, state, and national institutions. 3. Visit Library of Congress to view holdings and confirm list	Monger Rompilla Holley Coen Projekts	200 Hours

	<p>of photographs copyrighted by Alice Austen (not available remotely).</p> <p>4. Conduct inventory of current period rooms to identify objects to be retained for updated permanent installation.</p>		
Sep - Nov 2017	1. Final drafts of primary interpretive text panels for interior and exterior spaces of the permanent exhibition.	Rompilla Holley Monger Moakley McDonnell	100 Hours
Dec 2017 – Jan 2018	<p>1. Determine final selection of images for installation.</p> <p>2. Obtain digital files and complete image request paperwork for outside images of Alice Austen’s work.</p> <p>3. Distribute interpretive panel text to scholars to review; scholars provide input and add/revise interpretive text.</p>	Monger Holley Moakley McDonnell Rompilla Scholars	80 Hours
Feb – Apr 2018	<p>1. Convene meeting of the Advisory Committee to review interpretive text, collection objects, and final exhibition plan for effectiveness from their perspectives.</p> <p>2. Meet with exhibition designer to finalize decisions regarding exhibition design.</p> <p>3. Forward exhibition design plan to scholars team for final review.</p>	Rompilla Monger Holley Advisory Committee Scholars	75 Hours
Apr – Sep 2018	<p>1. Commission fabrication of cases for collection objects for the permanent exhibition.</p> <p>2. Commission outside signage for the exterior permanent installation.</p> <p>3. Incorporate edits from scholar and advisor team.</p> <p>4. Finalize design of all exhibition elements.</p> <p>5. Print images needed for the permanent installation.</p> <p>6. Assemble collection objects for the permanent installation.</p> <p>7. Engage conservator to assess use of original photographs and collections items in installation and determine appropriate light levels and display conditions.</p>	Monger Holley Rompilla Coen Projekts	150 Hours
Nov 2018 – Feb 2019	<p>1. Fabrication and installation of permanent exhibition.</p> <p>2. Create content and hire web designer to update website to coincide with opening of the permanent exhibition.</p> <p>3. Announce opening of permanent installation on website and in museum print collateral.</p> <p>4. Issue press release with announcement of unveiling of new permanent installation in February and conduct press preview.</p>	Monger Rompilla Holley Coen Projekts	250 hours
Mar 2019	<p>1. Open permanent installation to the public during Women’s History month!</p> <p>2. Launch website updates online.</p> <p>3. Hold opening reception and conduct tours.</p>	All staff	50 Hours

Apr 2019	1. Conduct final evaluation with advisory committee, consultants, and organizational partners. 2. Final tweaks to installation based on visitor use. 3. Prepare report to NEH.	Monger Rompilla Coen Projekts	50 Hours
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N. Project Funding

Alice Austen House's request to the NEH is to provide for the primary costs associated with this large-scale project of the permanent installation redesign, focused on retaining the professional exhibition designer and the fabrication and installation fees. AAH will supplement NEH funding to meet the total project costs through soliciting individual gifts and approaching long-standing foundation funders, including the Staten Island Foundation who had expressed interest in the project based on the planning grant work. Additionally, the museum will leverage NEH funding to approach foundations that would be inclined to support the museum undertaking this large-scale initiative that is fundamental to furthering AAH's mission for first-time grants, including The Andy Warhol Foundation, Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, New York Women's Foundation and Lambent Foundation. AAH is confident that with NEH support, the museum would be well-positioned to secure the necessary cost-sharing funds to meet the total project costs to successfully achieve the proposed update to the permanent installation.

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