



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT of NATURAL and CULTURAL RESOURCES
STATE COUNCIL on the ARTS

19 Pillsbury Street CONCORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03301

October 23, 2018

His Excellency, Governor Christopher T. Sununu
and the Honorable Executive Council
State House
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

REQUESTED ACTION

The Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, State Council on the Arts respectfully requests permission to award a Conservation License Plate (Moose Plate) Grant to the University of New Hampshire (VC #177867), Durham, NH in the amount of \$18,000 for the digitization of the Bowen Textile Collection effective upon Governor and Executive Council approval through June 30, 2019. **100% Agency Income**

Funding is available as follows:

03-35-35-350010-34000000
Office of the Commissioner
054-500527 Trust Fund Expenditures

FY 2019

\$18,000

EXPLANATION

Pursuant to RSA 261:97-c, Moose Plate Funds are used to promote the use and conservation of cultural resources in New Hampshire and to preserve the cultural heritage that belongs to all New Hampshire citizens by providing for the preservation of publicly-owned historic properties.

The University of New Hampshire (UNH) seeks support to create public access to the University Museum's Bowen Textile Collection through digitization of two hundred of its most significant objects as examples of textile arts and New Hampshire history.

What began as Professor Irma Bowen's UNH Home Economics teaching collection in the early 20th century was formalized by the UNH Board of Trustees in 1949 as the Irma G. Bowen Costume and Textile Collection which was established specifically to teach textile arts and design. Because of this origin, the Bowen Textile Collection has both historical and artistic significance as it not only includes a focus on New Hampshire's women and children, it is a resource for scholars, artists, and others interested in the design, technique, artistry, and historical relevance of clothing, resulting in continued requests for access to the collection. Even limited exhibitions and study sessions pose a danger despite best practice because the facility housing the Bowen Textile Collection is designed for optimum preservation of the objects rather than for public viewing. Since textiles are inherently fragile and damaged by exposure to light, humidity, and handling, this project seeks to answer both the accessibility and preservation problems facing the Bowen Textile Collection by creating a permanent online presence.

The Attorney General's office has approved the grant agreement as to form, substance and execution.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah L. Stewart", with a circled "19" to the right.

Sarah L. Stewart
Commissioner



NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS GRANT AGREEMENT

This agreement between the State of New Hampshire, New Hampshire State Council on the Arts (hereinafter "Council") and University of NH (hereinafter "Grantee") is to witness receipt of funds subject to the following conditions:

1. **GRANT PERIOD: FY2019**

2. **OBLIGATIONS OF THE GRANTEE:**

- The Grantee agrees to accept \$18,000.00 and apply it to the program(s) described in the grant application and approved budget referenced above. In the performance of this grant agreement, the Grantee is in all respects an independent contractor and is neither an agent nor employee of the State.
- Funding credit including Council logo must appear in all programs, publicity, and promotional materials. The following wording and Council logo should be used:



University of NH is supported in part by a grant from the Mooseplate program and New Hampshire State Council on the Arts.

New Hampshire
State Council on the Arts

- The Grantee agrees to abide by the limitations, conditions and procedure outlined herein and in the attached appendices. If appropriated funds for this grants program are reduced or terminated, all payments under this grant may cease. That determination rests within the sole discretion of the Council.

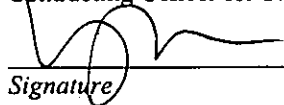
3. **PAYMENT** will be made following the receipt and execution of all required documents and approval of the Governor and Executive Council

4. **FINAL REPORT:** The Grantee agrees to submit a final financial and narrative report on a form provided by the Council no more than 30 days after the end of the grant period. **Failure to submit the final report will render the Grantee ineligible for Council funding for two years.**

5. **SOVEREIGN IMMUNITY:** No provision of this contract is to be deemed a waiver of sovereign immunity by the State of New Hampshire.

COUNCIL APPROVAL

Contracting Officer for State Agency


Signature

9.20.18

Date

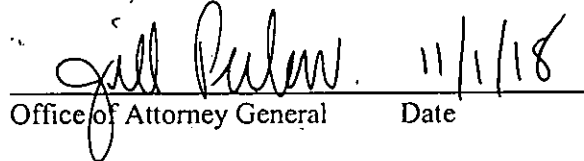
Name, Title: Virginia Lupi, Director


Sarah L. Stewart, Commissioner

Date:

APPROVED BY ATTORNEY GENERAL

as to form, substance and execution:


Office of Attorney General Date

GRANTEE SIGNATURE

Org/ Name: University of NH

Address: 51 College Road Durham NH 03824

Karen M. Jensen, Manager

Sponsored Programs Administration

Printed Name of Authorized Official for Grantee


Authorized Official's Signature & Title

10/2/18
Date

NOTARIZATION REQUIRED:

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, COUNTY OF Stratford

On the 2 day of Oct 2018 before the undersigned officer, personally appeared

Karen Jensen

(Print name of person whose signature is being notarized)

or satisfactorily proven to be the person whose name appears above, and acknowledged that s/he executed this document in the capacity indicated.


Notary Public/ Justice of the Peace

Printed Name: Dianne Hall

My Commission expires: DIANNE M. HALL, Notary Public

State of New Hampshire

My Commission Expires November 16, 2021

Narrative: University Museum Textile Digitization and Online Database Project

1. Verification of Public Ownership

The University Museum archives the history of the University of New Hampshire, itself part of the University System of New Hampshire and as such is publicly owned. What began as Professor Irma Bowen's UNH Home Economics teaching collection in the early 20th century was formalized by the UNH Board of Trustees in 1949 as the Irma G. Bowen Costume and Textile Collection (hereafter Bowen Collection), designating it a permanent collection of UNH. It was transferred to the University Museum in the 1960s where it permanently resides as a coherent and distinct entity of approximately 700 objects from the 18th to the early 20th centuries.

2. Reason for Undertaking the Project

While a handful of other textile and costume collections exist within the state, such as at the Hood Museum, Strawberry Banke Museum, and the Museum of NH History, none are quite like the Bowen Collection, which was established specifically to teach textile arts and design. Because of this origin, the Bowen Collection has both historical and artistic significance: it not only includes a focus on New Hampshire's women and children, it is a resource for scholars, artists, and others interested in the design, technique, artistry, and historical relevance of clothing, resulting in continued requests for access to the collection. However access is currently limited, only through periodic exhibitions, loans to other institutions, and private study requests. A number of articles and publications (Figs. 1, 2, 3) have also featured the collection from both historical and decorative arts perspectives.

This restriction is intentional stewardship, because even limited exhibitions and study sessions pose a danger despite best practices. The facility housing the Bowen Collection is designed for optimum preservation of the objects rather than for public viewing (Figs. 4,5), since textiles are inherently fragile and damaged by exposure to light, humidity, handling, and even by characteristics of the objects themselves. Sheer gauze 1920s era dresses trimmed with heavy beads are now stored safely flat, but decades spent on hangers caused tears from the weight (Fig. 6). Other dresses have no fabric left in the underarm where over a century of perspiration acidity has eaten it away (Fig. 7). Metallic salts, potentially including arsenic, used to produce silk now shatter the fabric into shards, slowly destroying an 1850s dress even as it rests untouched in its box (Fig. 8). The hair comb made of an early plastic inexorably crumbles into crystals as its plasticizer seeps out, releasing damaging nitric acid (Fig. 9). These are challenges, but taking inspiration from how flagship museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts have made their own fragile costume collections available online, this project seeks to answer both the accessibility and preservation problems facing the Bowen Collection by creating a permanent online presence.

Because this effort is outside the normal scope of the University Museum, with its limited staff and a budget designated for modest exhibition and collections care costs, grant funding is being sought to provide the specialized knowledge and skills not available in-house. There is precedent; past support for special projects for the Bowen Collection has come as grants from the Costume Society of America, the UNH Center for the Humanities, volunteer efforts by the New Hampshire branch of the American Sewing Guild, and two internships. With completion of this project, the

Bowen Collection will be relatively unique in the state: the Hood's site (scroll down on site to see images) only offers a tiny handful of photographed items; Strawbery Banke has about 70 garments online but they are usually shown flat or on hangers, which obscures important information about them, and there is no provenance given; the Museum of NH History offers provenance but most garments are shown on hangers or flat, with quite small photography; and historic houses such as John Paul Jones or Moffatt-Ladd have no online databases. With this project providing quality data and photography in a searchable online database accessible to all, the Bowen Collection has an opportunity to greatly improve the service it provides by furthering historical scholarship and bringing its original mission of promoting textile arts into the 21st century, without subjecting its objects to excessive handling and exposure. Indeed, an online presence will be the only way some garments will ever be viewable; a spectacular 1890s evening gown is now too delicate for exhibition, but photographs will capture its glittering glory for posterity while it rests permanently in its box.

The proposed web-based image database will be hosted on the UNH library's Digital Collections site and will combine existing computerized catalog information with new high-resolution photography. With the grant's timeframe of one year, the achievable goal is to make 200 of the most important garments and accessories available online by the end of June 2019. The hope is to eventually include more of the collection, but these 200 objects, selected by the museum director and project specialist, will highlight New Hampshire history and fulfill Irma Bowen's original purpose of exploring textile arts.

The project seeks to expand the reach of past exhibitions such as *Embellishments: Constructing Victorian Detail*, first shown at UNH in 2014. Nine core design concepts used in the late 19th century were shown in a variety of combinations, materials, and complexity in twenty garments and accessories ranging from elaborate high fashion couture to more modest home made everyday wear, and shared the stories of the New Hampshire women who wore them. An award-winning exhibition catalog/how-to book sold out to international audiences, and has since been reissued. The exhibition traveled by demand to two more venues, and then in 2017 became the center of a greatly expanded 50-garment show incorporating additional clothes from the Bowen Collection as well as from four other regional museums. Similarly, there are plans for the public unveiling of the digitization project with a September 2019 exhibition at the University Museum, drawn from the 200 objects newly available online, most of which will never have been exhibited before.

3. Accomplishing the Digitization Project

To be successful, the planned online database requires information on each object and good photography. With the object records already expanded and computerized from earlier work underwritten by the University Museum and Library (Fig. 10), photography is now needed. However a garment flat on a table or suspended shapelessly from a hanger conveys nothing of the drastic changes in cut and shape from the 18th through early 20th centuries. In order to maximize visual information in an image, a historic garment should be mounted to reveal the appropriate silhouette and characteristics for its date (Fig. 11). Normally this is an expensive and time-consuming proposition, but because of past exhibitions the museum already has the necessary mannequins. Crucially, through already-completed work to house and organize the collection, garments are now

stored in chronological order. This means that for this project, mounting and photography can occur more quickly and in a logical manner, working by decade with mannequins prepared for the correct fashionable silhouette of an entire section of the collection at a time, requiring only minor adjustments from garment to garment. The project begins with this advantage ready to deploy.

Step One: Select candidates for digitization. About 120 of the most significant garments are planned for inclusion. Corsets, hoops, and bustles will be photographed as well, then a selection of other accessories such as stockings, hats, and shoes for a total of 200 objects in all. Preliminary lists will be drawn up by the project specialist and approved by the museum director, based on historic relevance to New Hampshire and artistic merits. Initial lists are to be **completed by mid-July 2018.**

Step Two: Photography. A photography studio will be set up within the storage facility for minimal object disruption. An estimated nine garments can be mounted and photographed per week, using the era-based mannequin approach and working systematically decade by decade. The accessory photography, with its easier set up, will take less time. Image processing will occur in step with photography, so that any reshoots can happen without having to re-alter mannequins. The projected timeline for photography is six months, **completed by January 2019.**

Step Three: Web integration. During the final six months of the grant period UNH Digital Collections IT staff will work with the project specialist on consolidating the object database with the photographs, formatting, and integrating into the existing Digital Collections public interface (Figs. 12, 13, 14). Testing and correcting errors will **conclude the project by the end of June 2019.**

Project Specialist

There is a single bid for this project due to the unique collection familiarity and skill set of the specialist. Since 2000, costume and textile historian Astrida Schaeffer has worked with the Bowen Collection as volunteer, consultant, guest curator, and independent scholar, developing an intimate knowledge of the holdings. On behalf of the Bowen Collection, Schaeffer: supervised volunteer efforts by members of the American Sewing Guild; oversaw two internships; implemented a Costume Society of America grant; researched, catalogued (Fig. 10), reorganized, and rehoused the collection (Figs. 4, 5); gave tours (Figs. 15, 16); arranged institutional loans; hosted a costume symposium; curated three exhibitions, one of which traveled; led hands-on workshops for textile artists (Figs. 17, 18); presented scholarly articles to academic symposia and conferences; presented popular audience lectures for museums and community groups; appeared on New Hampshire Public Radio; and wrote *Embellishments*, the book referenced above (Fig. 1), as well as a series of articles geared toward textile enthusiasts (Figs. 2, 3). *See attached support documents.*

4. Sustained Public Benefit

The UNH library's Digital Collections online resource offers free public access to digitized books, letters, photographs, and more. Its focus is the history of the state, its people, places, governance, and industries, including the history of UNH. The Bowen Collection is well suited for this platform, and will have its own portal where this project will be hosted in perpetuity, maintained by IT staff as an inherent part of the overall site upkeep. With the UNH Library's commitment to being a partner in the development of the New Hampshire Digital Library, digital content created as part of this

project will be available both there and through the Digital Public Library of America. Furthermore, once the project is established, the potential for objects to be added in future becomes a possibility.

The Bowen Collection, with its ephemeral artifacts of women and children, has a responsibility to share what these objects represent. Clothing is very much a form of decorative art, as Bowen herself understood. What she taught with her collection was the understanding of materials and their physical capacities, the power of deliberate composition of elements, and the considered visual manipulation of fabrics to capture and refine how light interacts with a human body in motion. One dress can be described as “brown.” Yet it is a complex interplay of textures, a matte silk set off with fabric of the same shade but with the reflective properties of shiny satin. Satin edges the matte, outlining elements by catching light, or is added to the surface in shapes designed to draw the eye. Even the matte silk itself is used to careful effect, playing with how fabric changes if used on the straight grain or on the diagonal. The sleek satin of another garment molds to the body, gleaming, then adds lush velvet to trap light. A gown of plain white wool is given complexity and texture with pleated fronds of white silk satin ribbon, whose folds add dimensionality and a shimmer that shifts with each turn. Knowledge of how the eye can be led to emphasize form and trick it with illusion is also evident: strong diagonals on a bodice make shoulders appear more broad and so the waist more narrow, seemingly accidental drapes of fabric disguise a flaw, and so on. Of course clothing is also utilitarian, but even here the simplest homemade garment reveals a touch of artistry and expression with a tiny bit of trim made of the scraps left over from the dress itself. As the most intimate form of personal expression, clothing uses color, texture, and intricacy as its medium. There is virtuosity in the needle and design eye of the skilled maker, and creative aspiration in the reach of the amateur.

The Bowen Collection’s holdings are not events written up in history books, yet these objects touch on lives often otherwise invisible. They provide a literal material record of how women and children lived, what mattered to them, how they interacted with their world, how they adapted to emerging technologies and opportunities, and how daily life played out in the shadows of major events. In the record of preserved dresses, altered seams, imported fabrics, homespun, stains, patches, and secret padding, history is writ on a personal scale. The core of the collection belonged to New Hampshire women whose stories have relevance to the heritage of the state from its earliest days. A vibrant yellow silk skirt hints of luxury in the rural life of Temperance Pickering Knight, whose husband ran the ferry between Dover and Newington in the mid-18th century. The ladies of the prominent Frost Sawyer family, whose Durham homestead is one of the oldest in the state, share glimpses of a changing world with an 1850s hand sewn cotton housedress, an elaborate Paris gown, bonnets made in Dover, a plain linen coat worn against the coal dust of the new passenger trains, and more. An 1870s Somersworth mill overseer’s wife designed and made herself a fancy dress to impress her new neighbors, using a newfangled sewing machine. In Keene, Johanna Peterson, just arrived from Denmark, wore her red silk best dress to marry a cabinetmaker and fellow émigré, never guessing their grandson would one day become governor of New Hampshire. These are just some of the stories found in the collection, just some of the people brought back into the conversation about who we are and where we came from. With this project, the Bowen Collection will continue to speak beyond the confines of its wardrobes and boxes in Durham, sharing the state’s heritage in perpetuity through digital preservation.