

Update on the Atwater Kent Collection at Drexel University

January 2023

Following is an overview of Drexel University's work with the Atwater Kent Collection (AKC) since June 2022.

Collection Move

Drexel planned and completed a collection move from July to November 2022. The entire Collection was packed up and safely moved from the old warehouse to its new storage facilities, located in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Arts' Hamilton Building. Approximately 40 large-scale objects that do not fit in this new space were moved to secure storage on Drexel campus.

Drexel contracted with Atelier Fine Art Services to implement the collection move. The entire Collection was moved in 101 truckloads. Staff are documenting every box and all unboxed objects with new storage locations, and accurate box numbers. Everything was inventoried prior to the move and is subsequently being re-inventoried in the new storage location.

Philanthropic Support, Grant Funding, and In-Kind Contributions

In support of the collection move and the planned exhibitions, Drexel has raised funds from over a dozen individuals and foundations. We are very grateful for this generous support of those who understand the importance of this Collection.

To date, Drexel has received about a dozen public and private grants toward work with the Collection, including digitization—from foundations, the state (Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission), federal (National Endowment for the Humanities), and other granting organizations—with additional applications pending.

Collection Evaluation

Drexel's evaluation of the Collection is ongoing, having been slowed down during the move.

Three-dimensional items: To date, Drexel has fully completed the historical review of the 3D objects—34,000+ objects in 45 categories (less a small number of unidentified items)—researching, scoring, and checking the items against the corresponding hard/object files.

Archival items: The evaluation of the Archives is in progress. While the AKC was being readied for the move, the online, academic evaluation of Archival materials continued, with approximately 45% completed to date. These materials are being evaluated in groups by type, such as bills & receipts, drawings, letters, postcards, posters, prints, trade cards, etc.

Collection Database & Digitization

Project staff have accomplished necessary data cleanup and updates to the collection database (PastPerfect), both to improve its accuracy and usability, and in preparation for making the Collection accessible online. The team is working on the PastPerfect online portal access, as well as necessary website updates to host the portal. Launch will be coming soon—as early as the end of February 2023.

Related project activities include:

- **Inventory:** A full-scale inventory is being completed post move. This included identifying all objects, boxes, cabinets, paintings, etc. as they entered the new facility. Every box is being physically reviewed and inventoried in its new location.
- **Object Photos:** Since June 2022, over 1,400 photos have been taken of 3D objects during the evaluation process, with appropriate lighting (as possible) and often different views to further document the object. These photos are being edited, updated, and uploaded into PastPerfect with the appropriate catalog record. These photographed objects and associated records will be among the first items made available online when the public collection database is launched this year.
- **Archive Scans:** Since June 2022, over 7,400 Archival items, 1,300 Photographs, and 63 Library materials have been scanned. These are also being added to the records in PastPerfect and will be among the first items available online.
- **Evaluation Data:** With categories reviewed and updated with new and/or additional data, these data updates are being made in PastPerfect, in a variety of evaluation categories. To date, 22 of 45 3D categories have been completed (3 under final review), with updates to object descriptions, source information, materials, and more, as identified in the evaluation process.
- **PastPerfect Collections Management Database:**
 - **Web Edition Migration:** In 2021, the database was updated to the web version for staff use, and data management is still taking place; the migration caused several issues that needed cleanup. Since June 2022, approximately 1 million updates have been completed (over 18 million edits since 2019). Data correction/cleanup is happening in each of four categories (Objects, Archives, Books, Photographs) and a new People section. As items are cleaned up, various pieces of data are now being linked together to create a more complete, robust story of objects, their histories, and their importance to Philadelphia; this work is ongoing.
 - **Public Portal to the Collection Database:** The data cleanup, and the addition of photos/scans and added metadata to records is providing a foundation that AKC will build upon moving forward, in conjunction with the ongoing evaluation project. By the end of February 2023, Drexel will launch a portal to the database via philadelphiahistory.org for public access, beginning with a limited portion of

the Collection. Among the highlights will be the records for the 501 items featured in the Digital Preview (May 31, 2022), as well as the grant-funded project of the Philadelphia SPCA materials, among other selected items in the Collection. The Collection has never been accessible online in a searchable database. With the extensive object review, documentation, and photography taking place, the plan is to make accessible a portion of the Collection at the launch date and add to it on a regular basis, in conjunction with the ongoing evaluation work.

- **Rehousing/Storage Retrofit Project:** We continued rehousing objects in new archival boxes as needed. The bulk of this project is complete, with rehousing now happening on an as-needed basis. Boxes are renumbered as necessary.

Personnel

Since June 2022, seven employees (six full-time, one part-time) have been working with the Collection. In summer 2022, we hired a part-time intern, funded by the Decorative Arts Trust IDEAL grant program, focusing on African American materials in the Collection, specifically for use in the *Philadelphia Revealed* exhibition in 2024. We added a temporary part-time Collections Assistant to work on the PHMC grant project of scanning and documenting the Pennsylvania/Philadelphia SPCA materials. A full-time Assistant Director started in July and provided oversight of the move out of the former collection warehouse. A full-time Senior Scholar in Urban History and Material Culture joined the team on September 1. The remaining current staff consists of a Project Director, Collection Director, Digital Coordinator, and Collections Assistants.

Exhibition Planning

Drexel is developing two exhibitions based on the AKC: one for summer 2023, the other for six months in 2024. These two exhibitions will be the first opportunity for the public to view the Collection in person in a large-scale way since the Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent closed in 2018.

Seeing Philadelphia, the first exhibition, will primarily feature 2D works depicting Philadelphia over 200 years, including people living, working, playing, and celebrating. This is a collaboration with Drexel Writers Room, a community outreach program, to enhance the exhibition with contemporary views and responses.

Philadelphia Revealed, the second, larger exhibition, will run from July through December 2024. This 8,000 sq. ft exhibition will be thematic in nature, focusing on the development of the Atwater Kent Museum in its almost 80-year history.

--