

Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent Update September 16, 2021

The Board of Directors of the Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent (Museum), the City of Philadelphia (City), and Drexel University (Drexel) are committed to a transparent process for the transfer of the care and ownership of the Museum's collection from the City to Drexel under the Transfer Plan the City filed with the Court of Common Pleas Orphans' Court. The collection consists of more than 133,000 artifacts that reflect 350 years of Philadelphia's remarkable history. If the Orphans' Court approves it, implementation of the [Transfer Plan](#) will ensure that the collection remains in Philadelphia and is accessible to students, visitors, educators, and scholars for generations to come.

The Museum, City, and Drexel held two public meetings – the first in [February 2019](#) and the second in [September 2019](#) – to share the Transfer Plan and receive feedback about it from the more than 400 total participants in the two meetings. The Museum, City, and Drexel revised the Transfer Plan based on the public comments. In addition, the Museum held a public Board of Trustees meeting in November 2019 where the public was invited to comment about the plan. After hearing all public comments, the Museum Trustees unanimously approved the Revised Collection Transfer Plan. The Revised Collection Transfer Plan was then approved by Drexel University's Board of Trustees in December 2019.

The Revised Collection Transfer Plan is subject to Orphans' Court approval before the Museum, City, and Drexel may implement it.

This report is an update of key activities and milestones accomplished since the last public meeting and subsequent boards' approvals. The Museum's, City's, and Drexel's work on this project was slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The City's and Drexel's staff were forced to work remotely, and the number of Drexel staff that could work collaboratively in person was limited due to social distancing.

Services Contract for Collection Evaluation

The City and Drexel entered into a professional services contract in May 2020, which they amended and extended in June 2021. The contract engages Drexel to begin an evaluation of the Museum's collection to review and analyze each object and to identify those objects most relevant to the diverse stories of Philadelphia's history. Under the contract, Drexel will establish and work with a Collection Evaluation Committee with diverse expertise. Drexel will also provide the City with an inventory of the collection with a complete record of every object in it. The collection inventory and evaluation are important initiatives that will benefit the City regardless of whether Orphans' Court approves the Revised Collection Transfer Plan and the City's transfer of the collection to Drexel.

Museum Collection Inventory

Drexel upgraded the collections management database to a web-based platform and is in the process of transitioning the existing collection data into the new system. Most objects have been manually inventoried to ensure that each object corresponds to the information in the web-based database, and Drexel took record photographs of most objects. Drexel has spent significant time adding information about collection objects that was not previously included in the database, and the process is ongoing. The development of the web-based

system is in preparation for making the collection accessible online to the public and enabling requests for virtual and in-person exhibits. The web-based upgrade and update of the database also allows Drexel's staff to work remotely. The evaluation of the three-dimensional objects in the collection has largely been completed and Drexel will soon commence working with the Collection Evaluation Committee.

Fundraising

In addition to the support from the City of Philadelphia, Drexel University has raised more than \$620,000, including a significant multi-year grant of \$350,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities, to support its work to care for and steward the collection. Drexel continues to seek grants and to apply the funds to support the evaluation and digitizing of the collection, work with graduate and undergraduate students, and other collection-related work.

Leadership

Drexel has fully integrated the two leaders who would be responsible for the care and stewardship of the collection into the University's organizational structure to leverage its research, art history, museum administration, and curatorial expertise. Dr. Rosalind Remer, who is the Executive Director of the Lenfest Center for Cultural Partnerships at Drexel, was promoted to Senior Vice Provost for Collections & Exhibitions. Derek Gillman, who served as the Senior Advisor for University Collections to Drexel President John Fry, has been promoted to Executive Director, University Collections and Exhibitions. Together, Dr. Remer and Mr. Gillman are prepared to provide their knowledge and abilities to implement all components of the Revised Collection Transfer Plan.

Orphans' Court Petition

The Revised Collection Transfer Plan must be approved by the Court of Common Pleas Orphans' Court before the Museum, City, and Drexel can implement it. The City submitted a petition to Orphans' Court in late August asking the court to approve the plan. The City's petition is available [here](#).

Collection Storage

Drexel has acquired shelving and storage boxes, under the advice of a conservator, to better ensure the objects remain safe and in optimal condition. Drexel also reorganized the objects in the storage facility, systematically mapping the locations of each object. The Museum, City, and Drexel are exploring the possibility of relocating the collection to a location that would make the collection more accessible to the public for educational and research purposes.