

The Hyde Park Neighborhood History Collaborative:

Preserving & Expanding Access to the Rich History of Hyde Park

Project Overview

Historic Boston Incorporated (HBI) has been working with Hyde Park Main Streets and other local partners for the past year through its Historic Neighborhood Centers program. A category of priority projects identified in the program work plan created for Logan and Cleary Squares is Community Engagement and Education, which is intended to engage stakeholders with community history, increase the understanding of local historic resources and of the value of historic preservation to community vitality, and to build support for historic preservation projects in the neighborhood.

Three of the five priorities identified in this category include:

- Increasing access to local history resources and collections, such as those held by the Hyde Park Historical Society and the Hyde Park Branch Library;
- Developing an online presence dedicated to the history of Hyde Park;
- Engaging youth, elders, and the diverse population of the neighborhood with community history—both old and recent.

HBI believes that collaborating with the Hyde Park Historical Society and the Hyde Park Branch Library to fully catalogue, preserve, safely store, and make more accessible the Hyde Park Historical Society's remarkable collection of material housed at the Branch Library would make substantial progress toward addressing all three of these priorities.

In particular, facilitating the electronic scanning of important elements of the collection would create digital versions of the material, preserving it indefinitely, and which could then form the basis for a new electronic, searchable catalogue of the collection, as well as generating content for an internet presence dedicated to the history of Hyde Park.

Additional Background

After the completion of the district Work Plan that summer, in October 2008, then Branch Librarian Barbara Wicker and Hyde Park Historical Society members Bob Hannan (President), Gloria Ganno, and the treasurer of the Society met with HBI staff and its preservation/public history consultant and gave a tour of the collection. HBI was amazed by the quantity, quality, and breadth of the material in the collection, and came away even more convinced about the value of making this more available to local residents, researchers, and others interested in Hyde Park's history.

While there was general agreement by those present at this meeting that a project of this nature would be valuable, not everyone was fully aware of how other historical societies and repositories historic material have used the internet and websites as powerful teaching, research, and civic engagement

tools. It was also clear that, given the various interests of the Society and the Library, defining a role for a new partner such as HBI to help facilitate this project would need to be done thoughtfully.

HBI decided, therefore, to develop a broad proposal to put before its potential partners that describes a scope of work and presentation to demonstrate how powerful a web presence for the collection could be. When HBI learned that Barbara Wicker planned to retire, HBI put this on hold temporarily, hoping to be able to engage the new Branch Librarian with the idea of undertaking this project, and hoping even more that he or she would be as supportive as Barbara has been to the concept.

In the meantime, HBI continued to reach out and meet with Historical Society members, including Gloria Ganno, and received strong support for this project from Hyde Park Main Street's Executive Director Patrice Gattozzi, Bob Vance of the new "02136" neighborhood organization, and Interim Branch Librarian, Mary Margaret Potts.

Specific Technical and Other Assistance that HBI Can Offer to the Collaboration

Generally, the types of planning and other support HBI can offer are:

- helping to develop a plan and course of action in conjunction with the HPHS and the BPL;
- providing an electronic scanner to use to digitize parts of the collection;
- providing a laptop computer to use during the digitization process;
- providing interns or other staff to scan and catalogue material or groups of material selected, organized, and prioritized by the Society or the Branch Library;
- finding a website designer to advise on developing a rudimentary new website for the society, -OR- developing a new section on another organization's existing website;
- helping the HPHS think about ways to use the digitized versions of material from the collection to attract new members, develop programming and displays, and increase outreach (perhaps along the lines of the Dorchester Historical Society's popular "Dorchester Image of the Day," for which people sign up to receive a daily email with a historical image related to neighborhood history, accompanied by a brief description of it or essay about it).

The work of this collaboration represents an exciting new opportunity to introduce many new people to the history of Hyde Park—both people who live in the neighborhood, as well as researchers, historians, and others interested in this important material. Many neighborhood residents may not be aware of the events of regional and even national significance of that took place in Hyde Park—such as the presence of Hyde Park's 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment (one of the first official African American units in the US armed forces, which saw extensive service in the Union Army during the Civil War), or Hyde Park's early role in the advancement of women's voting rights (when in 1869, 40 Hyde Park women, led by the Grimke sisters, flouted the law of the land and voted in an election—50 years before the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote in 1919!).

There is important material in the collection related to these and many other significant historical events, issues, and people. Increasing access to the collection via electronic and other means will enable more people learn about their community and help them to appreciate why preserving its distinctive history is so critical.

Hyde Park History Collaborative

Historic Collections Preservation Project Intern Job Description

Summer 2009

The primary responsibility of the Historic Collections Preservation Project Interns is to digitally scan, catalogue, and electronically store important documents, photographs, and other material in the collection of the Hyde Park Historical Society, housed in the Hyde Park Branch Library.

The Interns, preferably working in a team of two, will use a scanner and laptop provided by Historic Boston Incorporated to scan material selected by members of the Society, the Branch Library, and HBI staff. Volunteers and staff from these three organizations will also be on hand to assist with the process and supervise the interns.

Based on a file naming and cataloguing system to be developed by the team, the Interns will make digital images, name the electronic files, and then organize and store them on the laptop (or on external hard drives). The purpose is to preserve delicate historical material, and to make electronic version of them for use in publications, displays, websites, etc.

The Interns should have strong computer skills and comfort with Microsoft Office programs such as Word, Excel, Picture Manager, and PowerPoint (although training in the specific uses of these will be provided). They should have a careful attention to detail, and be comfortable dealing with delicate historical materials, such as letters and other documents, photographs, newspaper clippings, scrap books, and the like.

The volunteers may also assist Society members and library staff with organizing and shelving the collection as necessary during the course of the project, and should also be prepared to assist with other tasks related to the preservation of the collection as needed.

The primary contact for this project at Historic Boston Incorporated will be Jeffrey Gonyeau, Senior Program Manager for Historic Neighborhood Centers, who will also coordinate volunteers and the oversight of the Interns.

**Historic Boston Incorporated
3 School Street
Boston, MA 02108
617-227-4679 www.historicboston.org**