

Houston Public Library

Grant Proposal



HMRC

Ms. Annette Rogers
Program Officer
Corporate Giving Program
Welch Foundation, Ltd.
126 Corporate Plaza, Suite #12
Greenway Drive
Houston, TX 77049

Dear Ms. Rogers,

The Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC) respectfully submits its proposal to the Corporate Giving Program for \$36,000 to fund the organization and publication of the James A. Welch Collection.

HMRC is a division of the Houston Public Library System that houses and provides collections of historical value to the greater Houston area. We offer a variety of programs that serve community members of every age and background. This particular proposal seeks funding for the organization and publishing of the personal and professional papers of James A. Welch for use in research programs. To ensure that the papers are readily available to the public, HRMC seeks funding for the care and storage of the papers housed within our collection. We look forward to exploring the possibilities with you. Thank you for considering our request. Please call Melinda Coolidge, our Development Director, if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

Janice Brown

Executive Director, Houston Public Library System

Grant Proposal by



Houston Metropolitan Research Center - Houston Public Library

TO

CORPORATE GIVING PROGRAM

Submitted on April 3, 2004

Executive Summary

HRMC seeks \$36,000 to fund the organization and storage of the James A. Welch Papers. By obtaining intellectual control over the collection, they will be readily available to researchers for use in research related to the oil and gas history of Houston and the surrounding areas. We seek funding to ensure that the collection is housed and arraigned according to accepted professional archival standards.

Contact: Melinda Collage · Houston Public Library· 611 Walker Street· Houston, TX 77002
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Organizational Overview

The Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC), a division of the Houston Public Library and the City of Houston, collects books, manuscripts, maps, newspapers, photographs, broadsides and sound and audiovisual records that comprises the most extensive collection of Houston's historical record in existence. A staff of five full time and part time employees work with scholars and the general public in researching the history of the city, providing reproductions of materials for personal and/or scholarly use.

HMRC grew out of the special collections department of the downtown branch of the Houston Public Library System. Rare and unique items donated to the library, as well as records of the library were housed in the building currently known as the Julia Ideson Building. In 1971, the library moved to a modern facility, and Special Collections took over the Ideson Building, expanding into the two current divisions, the Texas Room that holds a main reading room where patrons can view processed collections, and the archives, which contains a backlog of over 8,000 unprocessed items. Patrons must obtain an appointment to view unprocessed items, and viewing can only be allowed by permission by one of the center's full time archivists. As the center is only open Monday through Friday 9-6pm, patrons have a limited window in which to view the items. The Texas Room, which is responsible for providing access to processed items, is open every day of the week to the public without appointment.

Needs and issues addressed by HMRC

- Architectural Component: a collection of over two million drawings of major buildings and architectural structures in the Houston area, available for use by researchers, architects, and government officials.
- Oral History collections: audio and video collections from NEA funded and community collaborations, strong in Hispanic and African- American community leaders.
- Newsreels of KHOU and KUHT television stations provide the earliest available sound records for reproduction via permission by the studios.
- All photographs published by the Houston Post, used by city planners for arial shots.
- Regular lecture series conducted y HMRC archivists on historical topics and the use and care of archival materials.

Profile of Activity

Month Activity Materials Used Patrons Served
July Reference/ Outreach 6700 621
August Reference 6500 652
September Reference/ Tours 8120 829
October Reference/ Outreach 8215 835
November Reference/ Outreach 6425 703
December Reference 6712 731

Current Programs:

- Encoded Archival Description (EAD)/ Texas Archival Resources Online (TARO): Managed by the University of Texas Library System, this program enables smaller archival repositories to provide online finding aids to their most used collections via a website. Patrons are able to evaluate the usefulness of a collection prior to visiting online, saving valuable research time.
- Oral History Project: The archivists are actively soliciting oral history interviews documenting



under served and underrepresented segments of Houston, beginning with the Asian and Arabic communities and concentrating on popular cultural events like Rodeo Houston.

- Architectural Collections Database: This program is part of a three year initiative to create a searchable database allowing staff and patrons to search across the HMRC's extensive architectural drawings. Independent vendors scan the items to be placed on CDs which will later be converted to PDFs in order to facilitate quick transmission of data. This alleviates the need for costly and time-consuming Oce reproductions by the the HMRC's staff photographer.

Description of Request

The Robert A. Welch Papers include 103 Hollinger Boxes filled with personal and businesses records of oil businessman Robert A. Welch and his Spindletop Oil Company, incorporated in 1901. Welch was one of the earliest individuals to benefit from oil deposits found in Eastern Texas, and the company quickly came to the forefront of the Texas oil industry. While prominent on social activities around Houston during the 1900s-1930s, Welch was a dedicated philanthropist and his papers include numerous references to his charitable work.

The Robert A. Welch Papers Processing Project will enable HRMC staff to open the papers to the general public for research. In according with the Society of American Archivists standards, unprocessed collections are not available for research by the public due in part to the danger of presenting potentially damaging personal items to researchers. As this collection arrived from the previous owner, the Gulf Coast Historical Association, (now housed at the University of Houston main campus) there is no comprehensive guide to the items in the collection. In order to arrange the collections for use by patrons and to segregate personal items (such as payroll documents containing Social Security numbers), HMRC is seeking a one year project grant from the Welch Foundation to fund the processing of the collection.

Strategy:

- Hire an accredited Conservator to performed a detailed survey of the items in the collection.
- Create a preservation and conservation report taken from the survey.
- Hire a part time student intern from local colleges and universities to process the collection.
- Obtain sufficient archival supplies to organize and house the collection in accordance with archival standards for processing of collections.
- Publish HMRC finding aid onto TARO website to enable patrons to reference via the web.
- Promote the collection as part of current outreach and education programs offered by the HMRC.

Key Personnel:

Laura Finger, Archivist at the HMRC, will be the project's coordinator. She has worked as an archivist for almost eight years and has extensive experience in managing processing of archival collections and directing work performed by interns and volunteers.

Ms. Ms. Finger will devote approximately 15% of her time to the project and will be responsible for managing the selected intern who will devote 100% of his/her time to the project. Ms. Ms. Finger will be responsible for selecting the intern, monitoring his/her progress, and submitting regular progress reports to the Library Administration and the Welch Foundation.

Budget:

The HMRC requests \$10,000 to fund the costs of processing the collection. Costs for the project break down is as follows:

Total Estimated Cost of the Project:

Service Estimated Cost

Professional Conservator Consultation \$1,500.00

Archival Supplies (estimated for 101 boxes) \$6,500.00

Stipend for Intern \$2,000.00

Renewed interest in Oil and Gas History

With the 100th anniversary of the Spindle Top oil boom and its affect on Houston's economy, historians have a renewed interest in researching the history of Texas's oil industry and the resulting prosperity that it brought to the the city and East Texas. Historians from the University of Houston are planning to publish an updated biography of Welch, one that provides a more in depth view of the subject. As the previous 1956 biography of Welch was written before the donation of the papers to the the Gulf Coast Historical Society in 1971 (and later to HMRC), there is no factual based biography of Welch. Providing the scholars with a dedicated workspace with little staff interruption is not feasible since the papers are not processed. Archivists noted personal records mixed in with business records, and privacy concerns necessitate that every folder must be checked and inventoried before giving them to researchers. This is a costly and labor intensive process, and will impede publication of the new biography, possible delaying it for one year or more.

Potential problems present in unprocessed collections

During the first decade of the collections' existence, the records were stored in a rental storage system with no environmental controls. Damage from Hurricane Alicia in 1963—one year after their receipt by the Gulf Coast Historical Association—and 2001's Hurricane Allison caused damage to buildings across the greater Houston area. Water from leaking roofs or flooded basements leads to mold growth and a weakening of paper fibers. In order to rule out the threat of mold damage, a professional conservator must be brought in to evaluate the collection before it can be processed by HRMC. The HMRC believes that the quickest and most effective way to make the Welch Papers available to the public is through processing of the materials. By opening the paper to the public, researchers can avoid the lengthy and frustrating system of obtaining prior appointment with staff, and will be allowed the convenience of viewing the items at their leisure. HMRC hopes that with the opening of such a major source material in the history of Houston's storied oil industry that scholarly debate will open once again and the topic will provide the means for new collection and new sources to be used by future scholars.

Project Evaluation

HRMC will measure our success in achieving the programs' goals in the following ways:

- By submitting monthly expenditure reports: In accordance with the terms of the grant, HRMC will submit monthly reports of expenditures.
- By reporting progress via the library's newsletter: We will report progress of the project via the library's newsletter, which is circulated to members of the Friends, and public school and academic libraries in the greater Houston area.
- By keeping a total of papers processed: We will maintain a monthly tally of the number of papers processed, noting them by cubic volume and noting any special media.
- By publishing guides to the collection. Beginning in 2003, HPL is committed to publishing each newly organized collection's finding aid to the online repository.

