

Proposal Narrative

Project Justification

The City of Pella, Iowa is historically unique among small towns founded by immigrant populations. We were founded in 1847 by the Dominie (Reverend) Hendrik Pieter Scholte and a band of 800 religious separatist immigrants who faced persecution for their beliefs in their native Holland. Driven by faith, Scholte led his followers across the sea to America. There, with a trunkful of gold guilders, they purchased land in South Central Iowa and founded Pella - "the place of refuge."

The journey by sea was exceptionally difficult, as were the early years in Iowa. Scholte's own wife, Mareah, did not want to come at all. Ultimately convinced to do so, but unwilling to part with her most cherished belongings, she packed up her Blue Delft dishes in barrels to bring across the ocean. Reaching Pella, she was devastated to discover that all but six of her dishes were shattered. Determined to make the best out of a bad situation, she lined her garden path with the broken pieces, creating what would come to be known as the "Path of Delft." This is but one of many stories in the rich and colorful history of our community.

Pella's path to prosperity is lined with primary source historical documents, photos, letters, and more (herein collectively "documents") which tell the story of our growth from a tiny refuge town on the prairie to a modern, thriving, wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family. Pella has an exceptionally well-preserved history, owing in part to our wide range of multigenerational manufacturers - Pella Corporation and Vermeer Corporation among the largest. Cooperating with the citizens of Pella, some of whom are direct descendants of Dominie Scholte, they have ensured that our collective history has been preserved thus far. Now is the time to take the first steps to bring that history into the digital age, permanently increasing its accessibility for all.

Pella is serious about its history. Each year since 1935, residents of Pella have hosted an annual Tulip Time Festival in May to celebrate our Dutch heritage. Last year the festival attracted more than 200,000 visitors to the town over a three-day period. The residents not only support the Pella Historical Society and Museums, but also support another organization, the Pella Historic Trust, whose mission is, "To protect and promote buildings, landscapes, and sites important to the heritage of Pella, Iowa." The Pella Public Library hosts an active genealogy club, which meets monthly. And, speaking to the potential global impact of digitizing our historical resources, the Pella Public Library frequently receives and answers reference questions directly from the Netherlands about our history.

Despite the large community interest in history, access to the existing historical collections in Pella is severely limited. Many organizations have items which are difficult or impossible to search and hard to access by the public. Our goal is to have a system of digitized historical

documents that is online and accessible to the public, helping them to better understand the path that Pella's history has taken since those first settlers began to forge it so many years ago.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has a long history of funding digitization and preservation grants, often disbursed through the State Libraries which it serves. Our work on this project will primarily be informed by the work of the Iowa Heritage Digital Collections (<https://www.iowaheritage.org>) which is supported by funds from the IMLS through the State Library of Iowa. The Iowa Heritage Digital Collection (IHDC) is a great example of the work we are trying to accomplish with this project; we elected to go with our own implementation of ContentDM rather than work with IHDC simply because the sheer *volume* of historical documents present in Pella requires more customization and more storage space than a shared system would potentially allow. However, the IHDC does provide quite a few resources for getting started with a digitization project, that we will utilize heavily as we begin our project (<https://www.iowaheritage.org/digres>). The best practice documents linked on this page by IHDC come from a wide range of respected institutions.

We believe that the Pella Public Library qualifies as a small library based on our location serving a mainly rural population throughout Marion County, Iowa. The Marion County government has contracted with the Pella Public Library to provide library services to county residents. At the 2010 Census, there were 33,309 people living in Marion County, Iowa, giving it a population density of just slightly over 60 people per square mile. This is compared to Polk County, Iowa (where Des Moines is located), which has a population of 430,640 and a density of just over 756 people per square mile, which is a 92% population density difference. Additionally, according to 2017 State Library of Iowa Statistics, there are 270 libraries in Iowa that report per capita income greater than the Pella Public Library's per capita income of \$60.97.

The project we are proposing will have a wide-ranging impact on the citizens of Pella and the surrounding areas, as well as researchers and historians on a local, state, national, and international level. By digitizing these historical documents and presenting them online, we are providing permanent, open access to the rich community history of Pella, Iowa. Once the digital collection is established, it will provide many benefits to the community. In one example, the 6th grade students of the Pella Community School District might be assigned to complete a research project on a local business or person of historical importance. Students would be instructed by a Public Librarian visiting the school on how to access and use our Community Memory database. In another scenario, a local citizen might try to piece together a family history, tracking down a family member who was mentioned in the 1860 census and then by 1870 had seemingly disappeared. A national scholar doing research on the history of the Reformed Church in America might use the Pella Community Memory database to find out more about Dominie H.P. Scholte's friendship with President Abraham Lincoln, and how this affected Scholte's subsequent sermons.

This project will address the goals of the Accelerating Promising Practices for Small Libraries Grant (APP) because it will fund a sorely-needed digitization project in a community rich with

history of both local and global research interest, helping the Pella Public Library to bring these resources online and make them available to everyone. By creating a standard method for digitization and a permanent, centralized location for our Community Memory, we are addressing through the library a much broader community need. Though the project would be well suited for any of the three agency-wide IMLS goals, we feel that this proposed project has the most value in Increasing Public Access (IMLS agency-wide goal 3). As previously described, an astounding number of historical documents relating to the Pella community are quite simply undiscoverable. Our goal is to change that, permanently, by digitizing those materials and increasing public access to them with a Community Memory database.

Project Work Plan

We will host a kickoff to promote the project at its start and potentially line up volunteers. This kickoff may include newspaper advertisements or interviews, as well as social media announcements. Concurrent to this, we will purchase and install the necessary equipment at the Pella Public Library to begin the digitization project. While the equipment is on order and being installed, The Project Director will activate the subscription to ContentDM and set up our instance; this will include establishing basic 'collections' on the system and branding the system with appropriate logos such as the IMLS logo and the library logo. The Project Director, in conjunction with Pella Historical Society and Museums, will also determine appropriate default metadata fields and naming standards for the project based on input from both organizations.

As the system hardware and software are becoming operational and being tested, we will advertise for and hire a Digitization Assistant to help us with this project. It is our intent that this person will work approximately 20 hours per week. After the Digitization Assistant is hired, all project members will undergo training on how to use the ContentDM system correctly and efficiently. This training will be provided by OCLC, either in the form of pre-recorded webinars or live private sessions if they are offered.

The Project Director will go through and ensure that the Pella Public Library family history vertical files are well organized and divided into individual "packets," making it easy for the Digitization Assistant to determine where each digital file needs to start and stop. At this point, the Digitization Assistant will begin digitizing the Pella Public Library family history vertical files. The Project Director will be in close contact with the Digitization Assistant and will arrange weekly status meetings, as well as being available should the Assistant have any questions while working. While the digitization is in progress, the Project Director will work on tracking down permissions for digitizing the larger, bound family histories donated to the Pella Public Library by various genealogists. After the vertical files are complete, the Digitization Assistant will finish the Pella Public Library project materials by digitizing any bound family histories to which we have the rights.

While digitization is occurring at the Pella Public Library, the new Assistant Director of the Pella Historical Society and Museums (PHSM) will be working with the Volunteer Archivist at PHSM

to get acquainted with the PHSM collections. Together, they will continue the Volunteer Archivist's work of sorting, organizing, and cataloging.

This begins (approximately) the second year of the grant cycle. Once the digitization of Pella Public Library materials is finished, the Digitization Assistant will shift to digitizing the Pella Historical Society and Museums materials. PHSM has approximately 25 boxes of un-cataloged but sorted local historical photos which will be the primary focus of this project. Pella Public Library will promote the new resource in earnest to its patrons and throughout the community. We will hold events at the Pella Public Library to explain the use of the new database and how citizens can volunteer to help. Volunteers may be able to improve metadata, transcribe documents, translate documents from Dutch to English, and provide their own historical documents to digitize. Handouts will be distributed reminding people of ways in which they can help and the process for getting started. Concurrent to this, the library will open as a permanent hub to submit new materials for digitization.

Toward the end of the second year of the grant cycle, the Project Director will approach the Pella Rolscreen Foundation (<http://pellarolscreen.com/>) and the Vermeer Charitable Foundation (<https://charitable.vermeer.com/>). These organizations are the charitable arms of the two largest manufacturers in Pella, and the hope is that by seeing the initial success of this project, they will provide continuing financial support for it in the future. Pella Public Library is prepared to support the yearly subscription cost of ContentDM if a suitable partner cannot immediately be found. Finally, we will host a grand opening celebration in conjunction with the Pella Historical Society and Museums, promoting the new database, celebrating our accomplishments, and explaining again how citizens can volunteer to improve this resource in the future.

Primary planning and implementation of the project will be carried out by the Project Director, Chris Brown, Assistant Library Director at the Pella Public Library. He will engage the Library Director, Wendy Street, as well as partners at the Pella Historical Society and Museums: Val Van Kooten (Executive Director), Jessi Vos (Assistant Director), and Lois Smith (Former librarian and current Volunteer Archivist). PHSM will be engaged for adding additional resources to the database, and potentially for accessing the base of volunteers that the PHSM utilizes on a regular basis. Additionally, Smith can serve as a project consultant; she is a veteran cataloging librarian with 28 years of experience.

Personnel resources needed for this project include an approximately 20-hour-per-week Digitization Assistant, as well as the staff members already employed at both organizations. These staff members are listed in the paragraph above. Financial resources necessary for this project are detailed in the budget application section, but roughly include: Subscription to ContentDM, purchase of digitization hardware and software for the Pella Public Library, salary for a half-time Digitization Assistant plus benefits, and monies needed for advertisements in the local newspaper as well as promotion in other formats.

There are risks to this project. The risk of damaging materials will be mitigated by ensuring that white gloves are worn when handling materials and only pencils are used in the work area. The materials will be stored as appropriate in as close to archival conditions as possible. The risk of inadvertently violating copyright of an item will be mitigated by creating a “likely list” of items that may be under copyright and obtaining releases as appropriate. Further, a process for declaring a violation of copyright / request for takedown will be outlined and the link to start the process will be prominently displayed on the Community Memory site.

Measurement of digitization quantity goals will be done on a weekly basis. The Project Director will meet with the Digitization Assistant each week and go over the past week’s work output, offering tips and suggestions as well as logging the official count of items digitized the previous week. Based on the number of potential items, the goal is to digitize and add metadata to at least 60 pages/photos per week. If the Digitization Assistant accomplishes this goal, he or she will simply continue to digitize, and more work will be added at the end of the project from the large quantity of untouched documents at the Pella Historical Society and Museums.

Project Outcomes

The impact of this proposed work cannot be overstated. The community of Pella, Iowa possesses a large quantity of historical documents that are important not only to local citizens but also to researchers at the state, national, and international levels. The primary problem has been, and continues to be, access to these resources. The project proposal described here would make a huge leap in providing access to these documents and at the same time set up a standard system for digitizing more documents and adding to the Community Memory database after the grant period is complete.

To promote community involvement and buy-in, we will create a web page that reports all statistics, both qualitative and quantitative, that are listed below. The site will contain a “progress” indicator for the completion of various collections and will also report qualitative comments collected about the project. Additionally, this page will have instructions for how people can volunteer to help the project in different ways, and how they can submit their own local history materials for inclusion.

Setting specific performance goals and outcomes helps to measure the success of the project. The first goal is to complete digitization of the documents that were identified for the project. Approximately 520 individual files consisting of approximately 2,500 pages were identified at the Pella Public Library, and approximately 3000 photographs were identified at the Pella Historical Society and Museums. If we can digitize all these items and provide them in our Community Memory database, with relevant metadata to ease discovery, the goal will have been completed successfully. We will record the progress of the digitization efforts monthly and report it as required.

The second goal is to have at least 200 monthly uses of the Community Memory database. ContentDM provides a monthly access log and can keep track of how many users have accessed

the database, among other statistics. Based on the monthly usage of our database of digitized Pella Chronicle newspapers (<http://pella.advantage-preservation.com/>), we have an initial goal of 200 uses per month for the Community Memory database once the project is completed. Since work goes 'live' as it is added to the system, we will keep track of the number of uses from the moment the ContentDM site goes live and report them in a spreadsheet, even before the completion of the grant.

Our third goal is to have 85% of people respond that they view the project "very positively" on a 5-point favorability scale on each of three surveys. Though it is not required for our selected IMLS goal, we will create a 'SurveyMonkey' survey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>) asking questions about people's feelings towards the project. The survey will be offered three times: Once at the very beginning of the project after it is announced, once at the end of grant cycle year 1, and once at the end of grant cycle year 2. Other survey questions and their outcomes will also be reported once they are determined. The survey will be short, as our experience has been that longer surveys are often not completed or have very low participation.

Though it cannot be measured directly, it is also helpful to collect qualitative data. The successful project will generate positive feedback and stories from people who either use the database to seek and find specific information, or from people who were simply informed or entertained by the site even if they were not seeking specific information. We will encourage users to submit success stories and we will keep a log of those stories. The stories will be utilized both in grant reports and in future promotional efforts.

As mentioned earlier in this document, we intend to approach local charitable partners such as the Pella Rolscreen Foundation and the Vermeer Charitable Foundation about the ongoing financial support for this project. There are also other local charitable organizations such as the Marion County Community Foundation (<https://mccfiowa.org/>) and the Pella Community Foundation (<https://www.pellacommunityfoundation.org/>) that may be willing to assist. The Pella Public Library is prepared, if necessary, to take on the annual subscription cost for the ContentDM site. The Project Director will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the site and coordinating future efforts to add materials to the database. There are many other documents as the Pella Historical Society and Museums, as well as at other organizations, which have not been addressed by this grant and are targets of future projects.

The exact plan for continuing this work after the grant period would depend on available staff or volunteers to work on the project. We will make a permanent home for the digitization equipment at the Pella Public Library so that when volunteers are available, they may be trained and quickly get up to speed with adding materials to the collection. Materials added will then be put into a queue in the ContentDM system for final approval by the Project Director before being published. The Project Director himself intends to continue work on this project as he is able with his other library responsibilities. The hope is to write additional grants in the future that will push the overall project forward more quickly after this project is complete.