HSP Receives NEH-IMLS Digital Partnership grant for PhilaPlace

Captive Philadelphia History and Culture “Beyond the Bell”

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), working in collaboration with the City of Philadelphia Department of Records and the University of Pennsylvania School of Design, has received over $500,000 in grants to develop PhilaPlace: A Neighborhood History And Culture Project. PhilaPlace will be an interactive Web resource launching in fall 2008 chronicling the history, culture, and architecture of two of Philadelphia’s oldest immigrant and African American neighborhoods, South Philadelphia and Northern Liberties/Kensington. Drawing on residents’ memories, historical documents, images of historical and contemporary life, and digital models, the project will create one-of-a-kind resources showing how Philadelphia, the “city of neighborhoods,” has changed over three centuries. While most history and culture is researched and delivered by scholars, teachers, and guides, PhilaPlace asks residents to share their stories with the public, making constructing and sharing Philadelphia’s past a collaborative, grass-roots initiative. By bridging disciplines, media, and audiences, PhilaPlace will create a new model for connecting the public with rich archival repositories like HSP, and for using places as an essential touchstone for memory, history, and culture.

The largest and most recent award was announced on September 17 and is supported jointly by The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). HSP received $347,520 and was one of only three grant recipients under Advancing Knowledge: The IMLS/NEH Digital Partnership, a funding opportunity that brings humanities scholars together with museum, library, archives, and IT professionals to spur innovative digital projects. A large implementation grant of $150,000 was announced on March 1, 2007, from the Heritage Philadelphia Program, a program of the Philadelphia Center for Arts and Heritage, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and administered by the University of the Arts. Another $18,180 was awarded in December 2006, in combined outright and Gift-and-Matching funds from the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, the Federal-State Partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. A grant of $5,000 was also received from the Walter J. Miller Foundation.

Situated south and north respectively of the Center City historic district, South Philadelphia (including old Southwark and Bella Vista) and Northern Liberties/Kensington were chosen as neighborhoods for the pilot because they are two of Philadelphia’s oldest, yet historically overlooked neighborhood clusters. These neighborhoods were the sites of the various industries that made Philadelphia the “workshop of the world” and home to successive immigrant and African American communities for almost three centuries. Their buildings and streetscapes retain historical traces and layers of meaning that are essential to understanding the history of Philadelphia. While South Philadelphia and Northern Liberties represent the current geographic centers of PhilaPlace, the project could expand to include all Philadelphia...
neighborhoods. It is also a prototype for communities across the country wishing to digitize their cultural heritage.

For more information about the HSP’s *PhilaPlace* project, contact the PhilaPlace Team at philaplace@hsp.org [1].

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**Links**

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