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Decatur Public Library

Ms. Fisher,

Outlined below for the Decatur Public Library Board is an expansion of my October 2011 preliminary report to you of my activities and recommendations concerning the Local History Collection.

The local history collection is a great resource for the community and an asset to the Decatur Public Library. Since the 1870s, public libraries have brought the world to local communities, mostly in the form of published print material. During the past twenty years of the new digital age, local communities have made their history available to the world. I think the trend of this sharing of local information will continue well into the future. Credit for our current collection should be given to Bev Hackney and others for their efforts to keep it neat and organized. I believe that any problems or shortcomings related to the collection are due to the lack of time that staff has been able to devote to this collection, especially since moving to the current building, and not to any lack of devotion and effort on the part of Ms. Hackney and others. Concerning my work, Ms. Hackney, Ms. Standerfer and the LHR volunteers have all been very helpful and cooperative.

With the help of staff, since July 2011 I have so far conducted a survey of local history stakeholders in the community, drafted a collection policy that was approved by the Board and started an evaluation and inventory of parts of the physical collection. I created a donation letter that was needed to properly accession new material which was approved for use by you and the Board. I have also been in contact with organizations and individuals that have materials to donate to the collection and have brought in five cubic feet of news clippings and photographs related to Decatur from the Sangamon Valley Collection in Springfield.

With your approval, I have already deaccessioned some items that were donated to the library but were better suited to other institutions. The last tire made at the Decatur Firestone Plant (1963-2001) along with tire building tools and plant artifacts have been transferred from our storage closet to the Macon County History Museum where they are now on display. An 1850s Illinois riverboat log book has been transferred from an office at the DPL to the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, the repository of state history.

Here are a number of ideas/observations that I offer as you and the Board move forward in planning the future of the local history collection.

- 1) The collection needs at least one full-time person to make and maintain improvements to the collection and make it more accessible to the public both online and in the building. In trying to find information about how certain items have found their way into the collection I have realized that just in the past 10 years, there have been at least four different heads of Adult Services and that information about donations has not always been shared or made known to all staff working with the local history collection. I am told that if the DPL hires a full-time staff member at the Librarian pay grade, then the person would need to have an Masters in Library Science and receive a starting salary of \$46,800 per year plus benefits. I would be happy to help you or your staff write a job description and requirements for such a position.
- 2) Much of the collection does not need to be kept in pure archival conditions. Most of the materials could be stored and used in normal library HVAC conditions. One possibility to help with professional staffing and the constant complaint of cold working conditions would be to move the LHR into the library area where the microfilm cabinets are kept. By constructing a lockable glass façade the library could use a new professional staff member to serve as "gatekeeper" to this area. This redesigned area could keep all of the microfilm cabinets and add the most used (and replaceable) elements of the current local history collection. The most vulnerable, fragile and rarest of the LHC could be stored in the environmentally perfect current LHR and staff or volunteers could bring it to patrons on an as needed basis. Much of the unprocessed material currently in the storage room is loose paper and needs to be kept in archival boxes which could be stored on metal shelves in the current LHR.
- 3) You currently have many items in the closet storage space that appear to be directly under a sprinkler system. As soon as possible, these should be moved. If the current LHR were used for archival storage, items could be moved there.
- 4) A planned program of digitizing aspects of the collection should be instituted. This would help with both preservation and public access of items such as certain city directories and photographs that are in high demand yet fragile. Based on information supplied by the staff of the Illinois State Library, this process would require a high-end scanner (\$2000-\$3000); photo software from \$100 to as much as \$800; archival quality CDs or other media for storage; a database management system and a supervisor with knowledge to manage this process. This could be the person hired as the full-time archivist.
- 5) The library has chosen to catalog archival materials using the Dewey Decimal System and enter them in the online catalog. However, in any future arrangement I suggest a supplementary descriptive inventory be created to put online and have in the LHR that describes the scope and content of various aspects of the collection. Also, consider not arranging the collection in the patron access space in perfect Dewey order, but in ways helpful to the patron and the working staff. For example, put the school yearbooks and

city directories as close to the staff member as possible even though Dewey 373 and 917.73 don't follow in order.

6) At the Springfield public library and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library all microfilm is kept under lock and key and patrons can only access it through a transaction with staff. At the DPL users of microfilm are blocked from the view of librarians at the Reference Desk at least 50 feet away. This presents an opportunity for patrons to easily steal, damage or misplace film and makes it difficult for staff to assist patrons with questions or faulty equipment. Having some or all of the microfilm in or adjacent to the LHR and possible new staff member would help with these potential problems.

In conclusion, the Local History Collection is a valuable asset to the community. Even though past and current staff members are hard-working and diligent in their duties, they are not able to keep up with the demands of locating and accessioning new materials, processing the current backlog and future acquisitions, maintaining the security of the collection, maximizing the use of volunteers and using digitization and online resources to show the community and world what we have to share. The use of temporary contractual staff and volunteers can improve the current situation but an additional full-time employee is needed to bring this collection to its full potential.

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