

## **Update on the Atwater Kent Collection at Drexel University** **July 2023**

Following is an overview of Drexel University’s work with the Atwater Kent Collection (AKC) since January 2023.

### **Collection “Unpacking”**

(Background) Drexel planned and completed a collection move from July to November 2022. The entire Collection was packed up and safely moved from the old warehouse to its new storage facilities, located in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Arts’ Hamilton Building. Since the move, the team has spent the time creating new locations and making sure objects are in appropriate areas to maximize the storage space. Items are documented and updated in the database with the new locations.

### **Philanthropic Support, Grant Funding, and In-Kind Contributions**

In support of the collection move and the planned exhibitions, Drexel has raised funds from over 20 different individuals and foundations to whom we are very grateful for such generous support and understanding of the importance of this Collection.

To date, Drexel has received 15 public and private grants supporting work with the Collection, including digitization, from foundations, the state (Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission), federal (National Endowment for the Humanities), and other granting organizations – with additional applications pending.

### **Collection Evaluation**

Drexel’s evaluation of the Collection has continued while staff also facilitated the move, largely focusing on the Archival Collection. Considerable progress has been made in scanning this portion of the Collection.

Three-dimensional items: To date, Drexel has fully completed the historical review of the 3D objects—34,000+ objects in 45 categories (less a small number of unidentified items)—researching, scoring, and checking the items against the corresponding hard/object files.

Archival items: The evaluation of the Archives continues. The historical review of the Archives (in groups by type, such as bills & receipts, drawings, letters, postcards, posters, prints, trade cards, etc) includes researching, scoring, and checking the items against the corresponding hard/object files. Approximately 66% of the Archives have been evaluated (32,600 items) in 69 categories.

## Collection Database & Digitization

Project staff have continued with necessary data cleanup and updates to the PastPerfect collection database, both to improve its accuracy and usability, and in preparation for making the Collection accessible online. On February 14, 2023, the online portal to the collection debuted with 1,212 items in all four database categories (Objects, Photos, Archives, Library).

Related project activities include:

- **Inventory:** A full-scale inventory is being completed post move. Each box/crate/etc. was tracked during the move and subsequent work has required recounts and checking item lists. This is ongoing.
- **Object Photos:** Since January 2023, approximately 650 photos have been taken of 3D objects for the evaluation process. These photos are being edited, updated, and uploaded into PastPerfect with the appropriate catalog record.
- **Archive Scans:** Since January 2023, over 9,100 Archival items, 8,700 Photographs, and 700 Library materials have been scanned. [Currently library materials include book covers and title pages]
- **Evaluation Data:** With categories reviewed and updated with new and/or additional data, these data updates are being made in PastPerfect, in a variety of evaluation categories. To date, 25 of 45 3D categories have been completed, with updates to object descriptions, source information, materials, and more, as identified in the evaluation process.
- **PastPerfect Collections Management Database:**
  - **Data “cleanup”:** Ongoing updates are made to the database in every category and most fields in the program. This project is part of daily work related to every aspect of the inventory and evaluation and the addition of metadata, and updated research information. More than 25 million edits have been made to date.
  - **Public Portal to the Collection Database:** The data cleanup, and the addition of photos/scans and added metadata to records provides a foundation that AKC will build upon, in conjunction with the ongoing evaluation project. In February 2023, the online portal was launched with a limited portion of the Collection. Included are the records for the 501 items featured in the Digital Preview (May 31, 2022), as well as the grant-funded project of the Pennsylvania/Philadelphia SPCA materials, among other selected items in the Collection. The plan is to add between 50-100 items to the portal each month (after data cleanup and metadata additions). The item numbers in the portal from February – June 30, 2023, are:
    - Archives: 716
    - Library: 66
    - Objects: 1711

- Photos: 652
- People: 39 [searchable names/biographies]
  - **Total of 3,145 portal items (not including People biographies)**

➤ **Exhibits Tab:** The online database provides a structure to feature elements of the new exhibit, *Seeing Philadelphia*. Interpretive panel images as well as images of all items in the collection are available online for discovering additional information about items in the exhibit.

- **Rehousing/Storage Retrofit Project:** We continue to rehouse objects in new archival boxes as needed. Boxes are renumbered as necessary. In March we received and installed new flat file storage cabinets to replace cabinets that were more than 50 years old. All items were moved to the new flat files during the months of April, May and June, with some work left to be completed. Additional mobile bookshelves were acquired to house library materials.
- **Website:** With the launch of the portal, the Atwater Kent Collection utilized the former Philadelphia History Museum website [www.philadelphiahistory.org](http://www.philadelphiahistory.org) and implemented a new design with current information on the project. There are three main tabs with information to dig further into the Atwater Kent Collection project: About, Collections, Exhibitions. Through the Collections tab, you can access the Online Portal.

## Exhibition Planning

Drexel has developed one exhibition that is currently on display at PAFA and is planning a second one for July through December 2024. These two exhibitions represent the first opportunity for the public to view the Collection in person since the Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent closed in 2018.

***Seeing Philadelphia*** opened on July 1, 2023, and features 2D works depicting Philadelphia over 300 years, including people living, working, playing, and celebrating. This is a collaboration with Writers Room at Drexel, a community outreach program, to enhance the exhibition with contemporary views and responses. The exhibit runs through September 5, 2023. The exhibit is in the McGuire Gallery in the Hamilton Building at PAFA.

***Philadelphia Revealed***, the second, larger exhibition, will run from July through December 2024. This 8,000 sq. ft exhibition will be thematic in nature, focusing on the development of the Atwater Kent Museum in its almost 80-year history. The exhibit will be housed in the Fisher-Brooks Gallery at PAFA

## **Personnel**

From January – June 30, 2023, ten employees employed by the Collection. These include the Evaluation Project Director, Collection Director, Assistant Director, Digital Coordinator, five full-time Collection Assistants and one part-time Collection Assistant. With recent grant funding, new employees will be added in the coming months, replacing collections assistants who have moved on and will include the addition of a Museum Registrar position funded for three years by the Pew Foundation.