

**Pursuing Digital Preservation and Incorporation into Database of  
Complete Historic Newspapers from “The News Herald”  
for the Samuel Pierce Branch of the Buck County Free Library  
in Perkasie, PA**

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INFO 520 – Dr. Alison Lewis  
Grant Proposal  
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## **Executive Summary**

The Samuel Pierce branch of Bucks County Public Libraries is proposing to preserve physical copies spanning 128 years of the local Perkasio, Pennsylvania newspaper The News-Herald in digital format and to incorporate them into a searchable database. This will have the dual purpose of rescuing the only remaining copies of this complete local history from destruction, and to make this rich history contained within accessible not only to the local library but to the worldwide community. The library is requesting \$38,651 in grant funds to supplement the \$3,200 that has already been raised by local supporters and the \$9,375 in salary contributions by the library itself.

## **Background**

### **Community**

Perkasie and Sellersville, Pennsylvania, with combined populations of 13,392 (according to the 2000 U.S. census) are suburban communities located in northern Bucks County, about thirty miles northeast of Philadelphia. The towns grew rapidly from 1880 to the 1920's, evolving from farm communities to self-sufficient hubs for the area. "Perkasie experienced a boom time when the United States was rapidly changing in how and where Americans worked, lived, and relaxed (Jurin, 2008)."

Much of this boom came from the new railroad. Shortly after building a station in Perkasie, the town was incorporated in 1879. By 1891, there were 12

daily mail trains arriving, compared to only a single daily 20 years before (Moyer, 1999). Perkasio's heyday ran from the 1910's to the 1950's. In addition to the local farms, the economy included much factory work, making shirts, baseballs, and pants, and grew to include a ballroom and small amusement park throughout the Swing Era and World War II with a busy trolley line bringing people in from Philadelphia to Allentown. After the war, much of the factory work moved on to plastics and printed circuit boards and the clothing factories shut down. As factory work declined, Perkasio became a residential community dependent on surrounding towns for much of its goods.

### **Library**

The Samuel Pierce Branch Library is a public library that is part of the Bucks County Free Library, also called Bucks County Public Libraries. The county-wide organization includes seven branch libraries, run by a central board, and eleven community libraries, each of which has a separate governing board (Bucks County Free Library Website, 2009). The Perkasio branch is the smallest of the membership, currently holding seventy-three thousand items. Library use is strong in two main areas, that of high school student research and adult fiction book borrowing, with an interest in local history. "Book discussion groups, books for the homebound, story times for toddlers through school age, and summer programs such as the Summer Reading Club are facilitated by the staff and volunteers. (Samuel Pierce Branch website, 2009).

## **Patrons**

The Pierce Library and the News-Herald serve a larger area than Perkasio and Sellersville, which have grown outside of their borough limits with modern suburban development. The population of just the two zip codes for the boroughs was 32,699 in the 2000 national census, and the library and newspaper serve patrons from the entire Pennridge School District, which extends into several other townships with about 14,000 more residents. The U.S. Census Bureau states that Perkasio and Sellersville are ethnically homogenous with a white percentage of 97.5%, each identified racial minority constituting less than 1% of the total population (census.gov website, 2009). Perkasio and Sellersville each host historic museums and have a rich sense of history with an antique carousel, Colonial-era taverns, expansive park system, and original hotels and stations from their railroad days.

## **Library Staff**

Head Librarian Beth Anderson guides a staff at the Perkasio public library consisting of five full-time and five part-time staff members as well as about four or five shelvees working about forty hours per week. Friends of the Library volunteers help raise money for necessary expenditures not covered by the regular operating budget.



## **Statement of Need**

The town of Perkasio, shortly after its 1879 founding, wasted no time in chronicling its growth. "In 1880 the first paper – The Central News was started in Abram Benner's horse stable in the rear of his home (Moyer, 1999)." This newspaper continued to publish regularly up to 1943, when it merged with the Sellersville Herald to become the News-Herald. Throughout this proposal, the copies at risk referred to as the News-Herald include the old Central News before 1943.

With the sale of the self-published News-Herald in 1998 to Montgomery Newspapers, the new publisher foreswore the orderly acquiring of each issue. The bound copies of the pre-existing issues from 1945 to 2000 and the unbound loose copies printed since 2000 found a home at the Pierce Library, where they have been withstanding daily use by patrons. The pre-1945 issues were taken to be stored in the climate-controlled basement of the Perkasio Borough Hall, where they were preserved in wrapped paper, inventoried, and shelved [see the Picture Gallery in the appendices for clarification].

These copies, divided in their two homes, are the only known copies of this publication that served as an ongoing history for nearly the entire span of the town's existence. None of it has been preserved in any form other than the newspaper itself. If we lose this collection, much will be forgotten about the long history of this small-town American treasure. So far, time has caused the loss of some of the issues [see Picture Gallery for evidence of condition]. The bindings of the collections are being ripped apart, causing the newspapers to become

unbound, untidy, and frayed. Water damage has ruined some issues. The 19<sup>th</sup>-Century issues are reaching a point of no return with much brittleness in the paper causing erosion and breakage. Previous efforts for preservation have failed due to the expense involved in digitization. If we wait ten more years to start, many of the vintage issues may be beyond saving, and we will have lost them forever.

Other preservation efforts have yielded valuable assets and have shown the way to approach the conversion process: “We wanted PDF files for the online collection both for searching and display. We selected the text files so that we could have pure text versions of the archive for searching and also to accompany the pure TIFF images in the event that we would ever need to rebuild a PDF in the future. In short, we now have pure images of the documents as they looked historically as well as separate OCR text files of the documents. [The conversion company] provided an Access database of metadata that also gave us some relief in the building of the system: We would be able to harvest the information to build a back-end database in MySQL to support search, browse, and display functions (Goans, 2007).”

With this model in mind and having secured copyright clearance for digital reproduction from the current holder, the OCLC scanning studio in Bethlehem, PA was chosen as the scanning and conversion company due to their vast experience, high quality output, and nearby location. Their software enables them to make files that are compliant with the standards set by the NDNF

(National Digitization Newspaper Program) which will guarantee a seamless contribution to other online services.

In a small town like Perkasio, the local newspaper was the only record of the lives of the people who resided there. Quick action and digitization, along the lines described above, of the more than 100,000 pages of this precious collection is imperative if we are to save the story of this picturesque borough.

### **Proposed Initiative**

#### **Project goals**

- Complete inventory of existing copies of the News-Herald currently in storage.
- Convert newspapers to microfiche format and provide compatible reading machines to Pierce Library.
- Convert newspapers to both PDF and OCR formats for whole-page and searchable options.
- Incorporate files into searchable database conforming to NDNP standards.
- Conduct unveiling and tutorial seminar for public education.
- Use questionnaires for user feedback, improve database.
- Offer database for inclusion in Library of Congress and NDNP-associated databases.

#### **Materials and products needed**

- Two new computers and related equipment

- Two computer carrels and two chairs
- Two black-and-white printers
- Two printer consoles
- One microfiche reader
- One microfiche carrel with table and dustcover

### **Planning and implementation schedule**

- November 2009: Contract with the local branch of OCLC of Bethlehem, PA for digitization.
- November 2009: Inventory and transport of 1881-1943 papers from Perkasio Borough Hall basement storage.
- November 2009: Begin transfer to microfiche.
- December 2009: Purchase and installation of microfiche readers for library.
- February 2010: Return of original papers to Perkasio Borough Hall.  
Inventory and transport of 1944-2008 papers from Pierce Library to Bethlehem, PA.
- May 2010: Receipt of microfiche film versions of all papers.
- May 2010: Return of 1943-2008 papers to library.
- May 2010: OCR scanning of microfiche format and production of metadata begins.
- June 2010: Introduction to library patrons of microfiche access to complete News-Herald history.

- August 2010: Receipt of database with searchable interfaces.
- August 2010: Installation of computers with database access and library staff training.
- September 2010: Open house instruction on patron access of database.
- October 2010: Begin user survey to access problems with interface.
- December 2010: Use feedback from users to implement system analysis and software repairs.
- January 2011: Submit database materials for inclusion in Library of Congress and NDNP.

### **Method of evaluation.**

In evaluating the success of the application of any grant money, the first criteria for success is the digitization of the papers and the production of the physical existence of the rolls of microfilm produced by the scanning process and, second, the files that must be produced in compatible formats for the database.

Once the database is in place, customers will be asked to fill out questionnaires to gain feedback on the ease or problems with the interface as well as customer satisfaction or complaints. Computer usage statistics will be compiled to assess how much the local community is using the database and soliciting suggestions to maximize and enhance usage.

The final evaluation will come after any necessary revamping of the database and a subsequent patron questionnaire.

## Proposed Budget

**Proposal Expenses:**

Digitization costs for scanning and conversion service by OCLC	\$25,600
Two new Apple iMac computers and related equipment	\$5,298
Two computer carrels and two chairs	\$1,476
Two black-and-white laser printers (Brother HL-5240)	\$480
Two printer consoles	\$620
One microfiche reader	\$629
One Indus microfiche carrel	\$2,439
Indus table and dust cover for microfiche reader	\$784
Chair for microfiche reader	\$300
Costs of salaries: library director @ 5% of \$60,000	\$3,000
(2) librarians for inventory, transport and user training @ 5% of \$45,000 times 2	\$4,500
benefits @ 25%	\$1,875
Printing expenses for training handouts, promotional costs	\$125
Transport costs	\$100
Website development and refinement	\$4,000

Total costs:	\$51,226
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### **Proposal Funding:**

Friends of Pierce Free Library funds	\$3,200
Pierce Free Library salary contribution	\$9,375
Grant from Foundation being solicited	\$38,651

Total funding:	\$51,226
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## **Conclusion**

In an essay concerning the future of libraries, futurist Thomas Frey (n.d.) made several recommendations for libraries to keep in mind, including this:

Preserve the memories of your own communities. While most libraries have become the document archive of their community, the memories of a community span much more than just documents. What did it sound like to drive down Main Street in 1950? What did it smell like to walk into Joe's Bakery in the early mornings of 1965? Who are the people in these community photos and why were they important? Memories come in many shapes and forms. Don't let yours disappear.

We are fortunate that the previous caretakers kept bound versions of the News-Herald that could withstand the rigors of patron usage, and that they stored the older, more fragile issues in a climate-controlled environment with limited everyday usage. This foresight has given us the resource we have at our disposal, outlining the growth and everyday life of these historic communities and providing us with the memories described by Frey. But we are at a juncture.

The desire to preserve this treasure and the demand for access to it is there. The library has been stymied in the past by the expense involved in digitizing the material and making it accessible to the patrons. The time when we still physically have the material in a condition capable of being scanned is drawing to a close, and it is imperative that we act as soon as we can to complete this project. Funding for this project will add to our picture of small-town rural America as it was one hundred years ago, give a valuable resource to the nearby communities from which they can appreciate their local histories and take pride in the progress of which they are part, and expand the availability of this rare resource from the back rooms of a small town to a world-wide audience.

## **References**

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My thanks also goes out for the invaluable information and generous giving of their time to these residents of Perkasio:

Beth Anderson, head librarian, Pierce Free Library

Dottie Yoder, circulation manager, The News-Herald

Charles W. Baum, Magisterial District Judge and previous owner of News-Herald

Donna Benner, public relations, Perkasio Borough Hall



## **Appendices of Additional Materials**

- A. Photo Gallery of current storage and condition of News-Herald.
- B. Inventory of stored copies of News-Herald.
- C. Library's mission statement.
- D. Library's annual report.
- E. Library's budget for previous year.
- F. Financial statement from Friends of Pierce Free Library.
- G. List of furniture to be purchased for library.
- H. List of computer and microfiche equipment to be purchased.
- I. Copyright clearance notice from current publisher.

## J. Appendix A: Photo Gallery



**Main vault of papers at Perkasi Borough Hall**



**Dry rot of old issues in evidence**





**Storage at library of 1945-2000 issues**



**Poor condition of bound issues**





Water damage of some 1970's issues



**Damaged bindings of 1940's issues**