

As a first time ARCS conference attendee working in a historic house museum, the session I was most interested in was ““I make my parlor orderly” - Creating a Comprehensive Baseline Catalog at the Emily Dickinson Museum” presented by Megan Ramsey, Collections Manager at the Emily Dickinson Museum. This session provided a case study of a small historic house museum that successfully received grant support and tackled organizing a previously unmanaged collection of paper, furniture, textiles, general household objects, ceramics, and silver. Since many other sessions featured large museums with similarly hefty operating budgets, I felt that this session would be the most immediately useful to me for a variety of reasons.

Like the Emily Dickinson Museum, the Oneida Community Mansion House where I work as Collections Manager preserves a collection that has never been fully documented. I was initially hired as a temporary “Collections Fellow” to conduct a collection move of a few thousands objects that had been transferred to the museum but never accessioned. Once this project was complete roughly a year later, it was clear that much more work was needed to bring the entire collection up to modern professional standards in terms of documentation, storage, and access. Fortunately, this was exactly the kind of work I had been hoping to pursue at this early stage of my career and the Mansion House agreed to keep me on as a contract Collections Manager.

It was comforting to hear not just about the successes Megan’s experience, but also the challenges of completing such a time and resource intensive project. I attended the conference with an IMLS grant deadline looming that could help fund the baseline cataloging work needed at my own museum. To hear Megan share that the Dickinson museum was only awarded their substantial \$245,000 IMLS Museums for America grant after the third attempt was reassuring. The issue with their application was that the time allotted for the project was too ambitious. As someone in the thick of this grant application process where I felt like I left too much “empty” time in the project plan for unforeseen circumstances, this was encouraging to hear. Megan’s insight also left me hopeful that even if I was not successful with funding this time around, it would be an opportunity to improve the project for the next application cycle.

However, perhaps the singularly most helpful aspect of Megan’s presentation was that I had ample time to speak to her one on one both before and after her presentation. The opportunity to meet someone further along in the process of both the project I’m currently working on and in the same career path that I feel comfortable asking advice from in the future is invaluable. As the sole collections-focused professional at my small museum, it is immeasurable helpful to have a point of contact outside of my museum bubble to bounce ideas off of and commiserate. This connection was only made possible as a result of the ARCS conference. I look forward to the next conference where I can expand my network even further.