
INTERIM PERFORMANCE REPORT
“Object of History” [Grant LG-23-05-0061-05]
May 1, 2008

During the past six months the staff at the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) <<http://chnm.gmu.edu>> has made significant progress on *The Object of History* (OOH) project <<http://objectofhistory.org/>>. We have completed the object lesson portion of the project and are at work on the elements of the National Leadership Grant that call for helping other institutions replicate the best practices that we have discovered during our work.

Object Lessons

Since the last narrative report, the staff at CHNM had completed work in conjunction with curators from the National Museum of American History on the content for the final two modules: the *Lincoln/Keckley Dress* module and the *1898 Standard Voting Machine*.

Lincoln/Keckley Dress: <<http://objectofhistory.org/objects/intro/dress/>> This dress belonged to First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, who wore it at a White House event in 1862. It was probably made by Elizabeth Keckley, Mrs. Lincoln’s favorite dressmaker. The dress reflects the history of fashion and a First Lady’s life in the social limelight. Behind the scenes, it tells the story of two nineteenth-century women who formed a close, unequal, and important relationship across the lines of race and class. The content assembled for this module provide students with insight into the needle trades in the 19th century, the world of costume and consumption, and the relationship between working women and the fashionable ladies who bought their products. Additionally, the module explores Keckley’s path to freedom, her place in the freed black community of the District of Columbia, and her work with relief for African American refugees during the Civil War. Finally, the module provides an in depth discussion of the different ways that the First Ladies’ Collection has been exhibited at the museum.

1898 Standard Voting Machine:

<<http://objectofhistory.org/objects/intro/votingmachine/>> The mechanical voting machine is an integral part of the efforts to reform the electoral process during the Progressive Era. The move to anonymous and mechanical voting mechanisms provided an answer to concerns about corruption and election tampering during the heyday of urban political machines. The content in this object lesson situations the invention and implementation of the voting machine in the context of the overall expansion and contraction of voting rights in American history. Thus, students have the opportunity to explore sources dealing with African American enfranchisement and disenfranchisement, with the role of immigrants in late 19th and early 20th century political concerns, and the campaign for women’s suffrage. This object lesson includes an additional featured object: the “Jailed for

Freedom” pin, which was presented to the suffragists from the National Women’s Party who were jailed for picketing outside the White House in 1917. Finally, the module details the acquisition of the Voting Machine and the collection and display of election materials more generally.

Website Statistics

The OOH website has seen a significant increase in traffic. Overall, between November 2007 and May 2008, the site had 10,916 unique visitors, who made 14,631 visits, and viewed 68,390 pages. That is a 25% increase in visitors from the previous six months. In part this increase may correspond to teacher users who, having had a year to familiarize themselves with the content of the existing object lessons, were ready to integrate the content into their curriculum. This increase again suggest that the live audiocast events, with which we experimented in the Spring of 2007 were not a major attraction for teachers. Another significant reason for this increase in traffic is that OOH began being featured in the *Omeka* <omeka.org> showcase. Another IMLS funded project, *Omeka* is a web publishing platform built, in part, on the core system that runs OOH. Hence, the museum professionals, curators, educators and archivists who are investigating *Omeka* for their institutions are considering OOH as a model project for web publishing and educational outreach.

Guide to Creating Object Lessons & the Object of History *Omeka* package

CHNM staff members James Halabuk and Sharon Leon have begun work on the “Guide to Object Lessons.” This guide will include both pedagogical and technical instructions for museum professionals and educators who would like to produce an Object-of-History-type project at their museum, historical society, or cultural institution. On the pedagogical front, major sections of the guide will cover:

- the selection of primary objects for the lesson;
- the annotation and preparation of additional objects, images, and documents to provide history context for the main object;
- strategies for producing and recording effective curator interviews;
- pointers on creating curriculum materials that work with the state history standards and guidelines that will satisfy local teacher audiences;
- and suggestions for writing a “Doing History with Objects” guide that specifically geared toward the types of objects that are featured in the institution’s site.

On the technical front, the guide will include instructions for the production of the introductory movies, the QTVR of the main objects, and the recording and hosting of the Forum podcasts. For each of these elements, the guide will also point to a variety of lower tech alternatives, so that institutions without significant resources will still be able to produce high quality Object Lesson websites.

The technical aspects of the *Object of History Package* will be satisfied by a specifically design and bundled package of *Omeka*. *Omeka* is CHNM’s web publishing platform, which designed specifically for the outreach needs of museums, historical societies and cultural institutions. Building on a PHP/MySQL platform, the software is free, open source, and fully interoperable with other systems built on a base of Dublin Core Metadata standard. The OOH package will include a set of themes and layouts, designed by CHNM staffers Jeremy Boggs and Ken Albers, that allow users to replicate the layout and infrastructure of the *OOH* website, while

being able to customize their installation to match their institution's color palette and branding needs. The package will also include the MyOmeka plugin, designed and built by CHNM staffers Jon Lesser and Dave Lester, which will provide users with capacity to replicate the Activity element of the OOH website <<http://objectofhistory.org/activity/>>.

All of these elements, including the "Guide" will be made freely available for download from the OOH and the *Omeka* websites. We will publicize these materials throughout the museum community by advertising to the membership of the American Association of Museums (AAM), the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), and to Smithsonian affiliate museums through published articles and print announcements. Among the publications we will target will be the AAM publications, *Aviso* and *Museum News*, and the AASLH publications, *Dispatch* and *History News*. We will also post regular project updates on those listservs frequented by history museum professionals, in particular H-Museum, H-Public, museum-ed and museum-L.

Since October 2007, the staff at CHNM and the staff at NMAH have made tremendous progress on *Object of History*. We are poised to move ahead to disseminate the lessons we have learned in the last two years by producing our own Object Lessons, and we are confident that the *Object of History Package* will serve the needs of smaller institutions while increasing their ability to share their content and curator expertise with the local communities. We welcome further input from and discussion with the IMLS staff as our work continues.

Sincerely,

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