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To cite this article: Lisa A. Lazar (2013) Hidden Gems: Creative Artists and Historical Society Libraries and Archives, The Reference Librarian, 54:4, 263-279, DOI: 10.1080/02763877.2013.806237

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2013.806237

Published online: 17 Oct 2013.

Article views: 246

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Hidden Gems: Creative Artists and Historical Society Libraries and Archives

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Creative artists frequently turn to academic or public libraries for research. Rarely do they seem to turn to historical society libraries and archives. This article describes three benefits of using historical society libraries and archives to creative artists: the collections themselves, the different ways artists use the collections, and the staff expertise available at these institutions. It explores why resources at historical society libraries and archives may be underutilized. The role of reference librarians in promoting historical society repositories is discussed, and suggestions for reference providers (at historical societies and other types of institutions) are offered.

KEYWORDS historical societies, creative artists, libraries, archives, performing artists, creative arts, writers, reference, research, information use, performing arts

For some libraries and collections, serving creative artists is a core component of their identity: the Lila Acheson Wallace Library at the Juilliard School serves musicians, the New York Public Library serves theatre artists, the Harry Ransom Center serves writers, and the National Gallery of Art Library serves visual artists. Artists also turn to nearby academic or large public libraries for...
their research and creative needs. However, rarely does it seem that creative people turn to historical society libraries and archives. Although there is no literature on the subject, the author’s experience as the reference librarian at the Thomas & Katherine Detre Library & Archives at the Senator John Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, indicates that there are many benefits for creative artists using historical society libraries and archives. This article describes three gems for creative artists in these repositories: the collections themselves, the different ways artists can use the materials, and the staff expertise that supports the collection. Two examples are given and a discussion and solutions regarding the hidden status of the arts collections in historical societies follow.

Historical society libraries and archives will not replace the role of large public and academic libraries or arts-related special collections and archives in the research lives of creative artists. However, it is the author’s hope that by exploring and uncovering these gems, librarians and archivists will be encouraged to rethink their conceptions of historical society libraries and archives and add them to their repertoire of resources when serving creative artists.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This article brings together two separate under-researched topics—reference at historical society libraries and patron use of materials, and the research and library use of creative artists—into one entirely undocumented topic. Although artists often mention using historical society libraries on surveys or in passing in other articles, only Kemp and Parrish’s (2010) study, addressed later in the current article, contains an in depth view of a specific artist’s work in a historical society library and archives.

Little recent literature exists on any aspect of historical society libraries and archives outside of collection descriptions or the discussion of collection policies and practices. Salter (2003) described the history of historical society repositories, the role in the community, and collection and spacing issues but users and services are not discussed. Keller (1983) mentioned a few reference statistics and methods of responding to genealogical requests, which does give a good overview of the typical holdings of a historical society repository. Laugesen (2004) discussed the nature of historical society libraries through the lens of the early history of the Wisconsin Historical Society but did not discuss modern patrons or services. Koelsch (2007) described the artistic uses and possibilities of ephemera collections, found in abundance in historical society libraries and archives, but did not address any type of repository specifically. This area is in need of further research and study.

Literature on creative artists’ information needs or library use is only slightly more robust. Only two articles that treat all creative artists together
do so outside of the general category of humanists. Littrell (2001) described the results of interviews about library use and resources with art, dance, music, theatre, and apparel students and faculty at her university, whereas Reed and Tanner (2001) evaluated only the fine arts faculty at Texas Tech.

Although all of the following articles seek to define artists’ unique information needs, they all treat one type of art individually, often investigating subsets within that art. The visual arts have the most robust and continuous dialog about artists’ research habits. Layne (1994) discussed the visual needs of artists and art historians, and Cobbledick’s (1996) watershed interviews with practicing artists are the first to view them separately from art historians. Other demographics investigated (with varying amounts of library focus) include African American artists (Graveline, 1998), student artists (Bennett, 2006; Frank, 1999), art studio faculty (Gregory, 2007), deaf artists (Schiff, 2010), emerging artists (Mason & Robinson, 2011), practicing artists not specifically academically affiliated (Hemmig, 2009), and practicing archeologists, art historians, architects, and artists (Beaudoin & Brady, 2011). Hemmig’s (2008) survey of the literature addressing the information needs of artists yielded a consistent model of information needs and commonalities among visual artists that has generally been confirmed in subsequent studies, alongside the predictable emergence of increased Internet use. Although Hemmig’s (2008) model is similar to the categorization of artists’ uses of resources discussed later in the article, his perspective is from the standpoint of the artists, whereas the current article is concerned with possible uses creative artists could have for historical society libraries and archives materials.

Other arts receive far less studied attention. In the theatre realm, Kahn (1994) addressed how the range of types of theatre artists uses libraries and emphasized the importance of library research to theatrical endeavors. Marini (2007) reported the parallel needs of theatre researchers and theatre repository archivists. Medaille (2010) explored the reasons practicing theatre artists seek information; although the purposes are unique to theatre, the findings are consistent with Hemmig’s (2008) model for visual artists. The information needs of costume designers (Goodwin, 2010) and sense-making behavior in artists dealing with the works of Shakespeare (Olsson, 2010) have also been explored.

Research in information seeking for dance professionals is more recent and sparse. Grattino (1996) surveyed the needs of dance professionals in Ohio, whereas the Dance Heritage Coalition brought archivists together with dance companies to encourage the creation, promotion, and improved access to archival dance materials (Homsey, 2010; Maciariello, 2009). In music, the benefits to music researchers from using archives are described by Lesure (1972) and Wang (1988), whereas Gottlieb (1994) discussed library needs of conservatory musicians. Although the past decade saw a study of the information needs of electro-acoustic composers (Hunter, 2006) and
intriguing research on the needs of the users of a folk music library in England (Inskip, Butterworth, & MacFarlane, 2008), the predominant area of music user research is Music Information Retrieval, focusing on what the general public, not artists, are looking for and how it is found, usually in the context of an online system.

There is a great need for additional research in the history, purpose, and function of historical society libraries and archives and on the information needs of all types of creative artists. A formal survey and analysis of creative artists’ interactions with historical society libraries and archives would be a logical step to follow this experiential narrative.

THE HIDDEN GEMS

The benefits observed for creative artists at historical society libraries and archives include the content of historical society library and archives collections themselves, both as a whole and in arts-specific categories; the different ways that creative artists can use these materials; and the expertise of the staff.

Hidden Gem 1: Collections and Resources Useful to Creative Artists

Historical society libraries and archives offer unique materials and types of collections usually not readily available elsewhere. According to Salter (2003), “Most historical societies have within their mission statements the purpose of collecting and preserving the history of their area and making it accessible to the public” (p. 1179). Unlike general libraries, their collection focus is narrow but deep and comprehensive in the areas of local history and topics of importance to the area. Collection development strategies are usually based on subject areas and capacity issues, not user factors such as curriculum in academic libraries or circulation statistics and public demand in public libraries. Typical content of historical society library and archive collections includes the following:

- Rare items: publications with limited print runs and/or materials with few surviving copies in archives/collections.
- Valuable items: such as original historical documents, manuscripts, and early printings.
- Unique items: one-of-a-kind materials, archival collections.
- Unknown items: unprocessed, un-indexed, or uncataloged; resources not represented in WorldCat or other union catalogs.

Although published materials and archival collections and records constitute the majority of the holdings, historical society repositories also collect ephemera (from ticket stubs to posters), map collections, prints, lithographs,
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and artwork, and many have significant image and photograph holdings. Historical society libraries and archives may also create extensive clippings files, collating thousands of articles from local newspapers and magazines into subject collections; obituary files and indexes may also be created. Audiovisual materials and artifacts may also be held, depending on the policies of the repository. Because historical societies value objects as artifacts and not just information carriers, many have holdings of materials in obsolete formats ranging from glass plate negatives to stereoscopes to U-Matic tapes. Preserving these primary documents not only gives historical information to patrons by allowing them to experience a resource's native format, but also allows for future transfer of content to updated information containers.

Which collections are of particular use to creative artists? Any of them, potentially, but the author has observed three general categories into which materials may fit: arts resources, arts-containing resources, and non-arts resources.

- Arts resources are materials directly related to the creative arts, such as an artist’s papers, the recordings of a local jazz musician, a biography of a dancer, a set of author’s first editions, or a scrapbook of theatre reviews. The content of these materials is clearly related to the arts, and they are catalogued and labeled as such. Arts resources usually do not make up the bulk of a historical society’s holdings, but many historical societies hold valuable arts collections of local and national import.

- Arts-containing resources do not specifically focus on creative arts but may contain arts-related material. These could be historic newspapers containing theatre advertisements, photographs of musicians visiting a local organization, or a collection of family letters that include correspondence from an artist. They are not identified as arts resources nor are likely to have arts-related subject headings. A finding aid or contents note may include this information. This is a significant area for exploration for creative purposes.

- Non-arts resources are noncreative arts materials that can be used for creative arts purposes. This could be city directories and fire insurance maps used to find where a jazz musician lived or the use of grant records of a charitable foundation to find financial and program information on a children’s art camp. This category also includes all materials not on artistic topics that artists could use to inform their creations (e.g., researching 19th century prostitution to write a historical novel). This is another area with virtually limitless research potential.

Hidden Gem 2: How Creative Artists Use Resources

Most people using a historical society’s library and archives are using the materials for conventional historical research. However, this typical behavior
does not reflect more creative potential uses of content. The different ways creative artists can use historical society libraries and archives materials is the second hidden gem.

There are four ways that creative artists often use historical society library and archives materials. The categories are based on the level of direct connection that the library activity has with a creative activity. These categories do not necessarily appear in isolation but are described separately for clarity. Any of the resource categories described above could be used with any of the following research activities.

**Learning About Art/Traditional Research**

In this common type of research, sources are used to find information in a general sense. The objective is for an artist to become more knowledgeable about people, institutions, or topics for personal knowledge, background information, of context or for writing about art. This research can be on artistic subjects or on any topic the artist wishes to consider in the creative process. This is a common activity, similar to other research done at historical societies, except that it is conducted in the service of the creative arts.

**Informing a Specific Project**

The objective of this type of research is to seek out historical, factual, or technical information but for a specific, project-based need. In this situation, the information is used to directly inform an aspect of a creative work. This may be to ensure historical accuracy or add detail, depth, or texture to a project. This is a frequently occurring practice by all types of creative artists with the objective of achieving historical verisimilitude in any wholly fictional, historically based fiction or documentary project.

**Creative Inspiration**

The third way an artist might use historical society library and archive materials is for inspiration. The research is general, but the material is viewed not for factual information but rather to gather ideas for subject matter, design, style, materials, aesthetics, or for a different viewpoint. Primary documents, abundant in historical societies, are of significant value to people looking for artistic inspiration.

Despite being a potentially important activity for artists, library and archive use for creative inspiration appears to occur infrequently at historical societies. Perhaps the common use of historical society repositories for fact checking and historical accuracy overshadows other potential uses. Closed stack shelving also prohibits the self-directed, serendipitous exploration of
materials for creative inspiration; one must know and request a specific item before seeing even a hint of what may possibly be found in these collections. The digitization of materials and online exhibits has likely encouraged more of this type of use of historical society materials by creative artists.

**Inclusion of Primary Materials**

The fourth and most direct use of historical society library and archives materials in creative activities is the inclusion of reproductions of artifacts, documents, or images into new works. This can range from film footage in documentaries to set scenery to album covers. Requests for reproduction and permission to publish are common in historical societies, and each institution has its own costs and policies. However, describing logistics, law, and policy is outside the scope of this article.

**Hidden Gem 3: Staff Expertise**

Using people as resources for information is pervasive in nonacademic inquiry (i.e., Where is the restroom?) but is often underutilized in formal research. Nowhere is staff more vital to the research process than in historical societies. Historical society libraries and archives staff can be tremendous resources for creative artists due to their familiarity with the collection, their specialized knowledge regarding topics researched there, and the personal connections they may have with other experts or institutions. Because historical society collections are generally smaller and more focused than those at a public or academic library, the staff is well-versed in most of the holdings. This enables them to provide targeted and thorough research assistance, especially because browsing and self-service is generally not available to patrons. Knowledge of uncataloged, unprocessed, or non-indexed materials that are available but impossible to find without insider knowledge is particularly beneficial for users. Staff at historical libraries and archives often know other experts in the field and are usually willing to connect researchers with people and information beyond their walls. These connections, both within and without the institution, can also lead to new commission, exhibit, and performance opportunities and collaborations.

Historical society library and archives staff can be especially useful to creative artists because arts resources are rarely as well-known as other collections in these institutions and are not heavily used in the artistic community. Creative artists can also use staff expertise from historical society libraries and archives in their teaching efforts. Many artists offer formal instruction in their discipline and having a class session in such a library and archives can add a new dimension to teaching. Historical society library and archives staff go beyond offering teachers and students class preparation and research assistance to giving tours and conducting research
classes to all levels of students. Collaborating with library and archives staff for class sections or in developing teaching materials helps instructors shape their students into thoughtful artists who can use all available resources to create meaningful and informed works of art.

Finally, by working with historical society libraries and archives staff, creative artists can contribute to the knowledge and preservation of art for the future. Artists and organizations often seek out historical societies for the donation of artifacts and documents attesting to artistic creation. These donations are mutually beneficial: the institution has the benefit of acquiring the artist’s collection while the artist has the benefit of knowing that these works and papers are preserved and accessible for future scholars.

EXAMPLES

These three gems for creative artists—the collections themselves, the artists’ use of the collections, and the staff’s expertise—are evident in the following two examples of real creative artists’ use of historical society libraries and archives.

Example I: *Speak American*

An example from the author’s experience at the Thomas & Katherine Detre Library & Archives illustrates how a creative artist used resources of a historical society library and archives. Eric Simonson, an Academy Award–winning dramatist, was commissioned by the City Theatre in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to write a play for its 2008-2009 season in honor of the City of Pittsburgh’s 250th anniversary. The City Theatre’s Web site describes the play as follows:

*Speak American* is set in 1904 Pittsburgh where a group of newly-immigrated Slovak, Bulgarian, and Polish steelworkers are enrolled in an English class taught by a plucky beginner. Through the teacher’s dealings with the class and their boss, we are caught up in their indomitable will and dreams of a better life. (City Theatre, 2009)

Carlyn Aquiline, literary manager and dramaturg for the City Theatre, contacted me for a research consultation, describing Mr. Simonson’s need for firsthand accounts of working in a steel mill during the early 1900s and information on Americanization classes, which were early 20th-century English language classes for immigrants that also familiarized them with the culture and customs of their new country. One of the most commonly used Americanization resources at the Detre Library and Archives are the Records of the Irene Kaufmann Settlement (1922–1957), described in its finding aid as “Pittsburgh’s largest and most prominent settlement house” from the late...
19th through the first half of the 20th century" (Haggerty, 1988). Firsthand steelworker accounts available at the Library & Archives include diaries, published memoirs, interviews, and recorded oral histories. I selected resources from both published and archival materials such as these, and they were used by Ms. Aquiline and Mr. Simonson on several visits. The play was highly successful; Christopher Rawson (2009), senior theater critic at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, stated, “Pittsburgh once made steel. Now its history is the source of drama, and Pittsburgh is fortunate in its theaters and playwrights.” The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review theatre critic Alice T. Carter named Speak American as one of the top ten theater events in Pittsburgh in 2009 (Carter, 2010).

Example I: Analysis

Mr. Simonson’s use of materials from the Thomas & Katherine Detre Library & Archives shows the three ways in which creative artists use historical society repositories. His creative work benefitted by those collections related to his areas, although they would be considered non-arts resources. The materials were likely used to create context for the life and culture of the working class immigrants of this era and place and confirm historical details of working in the mills. Because the subject of the play emerged from his fascination with an archival image in a book (C. Aquiline, personal communication, March 10, 2011), Mr. Simonson likely found inspiration in the voices of the steelworkers and settlement houses, perhaps to write dialog or recreate a classroom. He and Ms. Aquiline also benefitted from staff expertise; because they contacted the library and archives in advance and described the needed information, I was able to have relevant resources ready, allowing them to make the most efficient use of the playwright’s research time in Pittsburgh.

The Thomas & Katherine Detre Library & Archives was not the only repository Mr. Simonsen used, but it was an important step in his creative process. Ms. Aquiline stated, “the play stands on a historical foundation and is infused with facts, ideas, philosophies, and inspiration . . . . Without research, it’s fair to say that this play would not have the same meaning, the same power, the same humor, the same humanity—it simply would not be” (personal communication, March 10, 2011).

Example II: Amanda Kemp

Another example of how creative artists use historical society libraries and archives can be found in the article “(Re)membering: Excavating and Performing Uncommon Narratives Found in Archives and Historical Societies,” in which playwright Dr. Amanda Kemp is interviewed regarding the historical research for her plays (Kemp & Parrish, 2010). Several of Kemp’s plays imagine and give voice to enslaved African Americans
referred to in letters or wills of their White owners but who themselves remain mute in the historical record. Because her work springs from these original documents and is meticulously researched, Kemp is a frequent user of historical repositories:

I am one of those people who likes being in archives, handling old documents . . . . It helps me to get a feel for the people or circumstances that I am eventually going to imagine. . . . I see documents as completely necessary and absolutely incomplete. . . . In my play Show Me the Franklins!, I am constantly highlighting documents and then asking audiences to imagine from the perspective of people who are mentioned but not quoted. . . . I have to both rely on archival materials and resist the ways in which these materials typically steal agency and power from African people. (Kemp & Parrish, 2010, pp. 46-47)

In researching for her play Sister Friend about Phillis Wheatley, Kemp began with published works of and about Wheatley, because, as the first African American to publish a book, Ms. Wheatley’s voice was documented in the historical record. However, when doing research on the Massachusetts Historical Society Web site, Kemp “found letters that were rarely mentioned in scholarly articles on Phillis and that usually did not appear in publications. . . . to Obour Tanner, another enslaved woman . . . . This, of course, made me wonder about Obour” (Kemp & Parrish, 2010, p. 49). Since Obour’s letters are not in a repository, she has no historical voice of record. Kemp changed the play to focus on both women, corresponding with the Newport Historical Society in Rhode Island to search for information about Obour through her master’s papers and census reports. Kemp’s plays of historical reunderstanding have been given at schools, universities, faith organizations, and community centers across the country and abroad (Theatre for Transformation, 2013).

Example II: Analysis

Kemp also makes use of the benefits available from using historical society libraries. The collections are obviously core to her work, with some documents even forming the foundation of her plays. Her use of non-arts resources is masterfully thorough for both research and creative inspiration. Not only have documents inspired her subject matter, but they are also integral to her process of “reading against the grain”: interpreting a document through the eyes of someone other than the author and intended audience who would be affected by the message (Kemp & Parrish, 2010, p. 53). As mentioned in her previous quote, Kemp describes herself as someone who tries to intuit an historical mindset through the tactile experience of historical documents and her scripts are fastidiously researched and extensively footnoted (Kemp, 2008). She has also benefitted from staff
knowledge, indirectly by the decision to include the Wheatley letters on the Massachusetts Historical Society Web site and directly by the assistance received with her research on Obour. Kemp’s work in historical societies contributes greatly to her creative work to heal fractures in today’s world by honoring, envisioning, and understanding the past through theatre; of her work, educator Niyonu Spann says that she “simultaneously stirred my intellect, my heart, and my imagination” (Theatre for Transformation, 2010).

HIDDEN GEMS: WHY HIDDEN?

With many resources of value to creative artists at historical society libraries and archives, why are these repositories not more widely used? They are simply not well known. More specifically, they tend to be smaller than other libraries, may not be directly tax-funded, and rarely advertise and as a result are often not widely known in their communities. They may have fewer staff, be open fewer hours, and not have a strong online presence; some are part of larger institutions that may not highlight the library and archives as a prominent feature. The specially focused collections do not have the appeal to a broad audience that the comprehensive collections of a public library have. Because items are often kept in secure closed stack areas for preservation purposes, visitors may misjudge the quantity and nature of the resources. There are also many soft resources at historical society libraries and archives. These are the un-abstracted and nonindexed serials, clippings files, scrapbooks, ephemera, reference guides, and other materials that cover a multitude of subjects. They are not easily described in a standard catalog and could be overlooked by researchers only consulting online or in union catalogs. These factors frequently combine to hide these gems from potential users.

Arts collections are more likely than other collections to be hidden in historical society libraries and archives because traditional history generally emphasizes politics, war, economics, and industry, although different regions may have different focuses. For example, despite world class cultural features, Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania are better known for historical events, geography, industry, immigration, and sports; the Thomas & Katherine Detre Library & Archives at the Senator John Heinz History Center’s collections and use reflect that reality. Artists with time constraints may choose to use larger libraries with broader and larger general arts collections to have as many needs met at one place as possible. Visual artists specifically value browsing (Hemmig, 2008), making the closed stacks in many historical society libraries and archives less appealing to them and perhaps other creative artists.

An additional reason historical society libraries and archives may be hidden is the negative connotation of a historical society or museum library. Traditional historical fare such as genealogy and local history are a large part
of the inquiries and collections, but historical society libraries and archives often document the entire range of human thought, activity, and experience of the region—from prehistoric times to the present day. Primary historical documents illuminate history and people and inspire one’s own creative process as few other things can. Although smaller and less well-known than other types of libraries, historical libraries deserve to lose their hidden status for all types of researchers.

ROLE OF REFERENCE LIBRARIANS

How can reference librarians at other types of libraries help connect creative arts patrons with these materials? Before adding them to a repertoire of resources, one must first become familiar with them oneself. The first step is to learn about historical societies that encompass the local area, being aware that there may be more than one. Meet the librarians and archivists and take a tour or at least explore the society’s Web site for information on major collections, subject strengths, and research policies. Include historical society library and archives staff in formal and informal local networks of reference providers who collaborate to better serve creative artists; even the smallest societies often welcome and advise researchers interested in their specialties. Historical society libraries and archives’ staff can be resources for reference librarians and their patrons.

Part of the art of the reference librarian is the ability to connect the patron with hidden or obscure resources. Once one is familiar with the types of resources available at historical societies, one can see the possibilities for connecting creative artists with historical society resources, especially those arts-containing or non-arts resources. This is primarily the job of the historical society reference provider, but a well-informed referral to a historical society may turn a researcher’s dead end into a possible avenue for exploration.

Because historical societies collect in specific areas, not every unmet need is a good candidate for referral. Searching the repository catalog or online finding aids obviously helps to discern possible resources, but even meager results do not preclude finding information in soft resources or receiving additional referrals from historical society staff. Best cases for referral for artists seeking general research materials or seeking to inform specific projects (more traditional research) include those patrons who are:

- Looking for information about local ensembles, artists, the artistic history of an area, or arts and the community.
- Seeking to explore or find details about a particular time period.
- Seeking information about local people or topics, especially when they are not found in readily available published works or articles but are likely to have been addressed somewhere at a local level.
• Needing local coverage, viewpoints, and aspects on nationally known issues or events.
• Wanting local information that does not exist in summary form, but could be collated from data (e.g., dates a person lived at a certain address).
• Looking to do research based on data from local businesses, institutions, or organizations.
• Undertaking research requiring primary sources.
• Doing artifact research.
• Searching for unpublished footage or sound recordings (rarer, but worth a try).
• Needing to do genealogical research.

Examples of possible referrals for creative artists seeking materials for inspiration include those:

• With any relevant historical interest.
• Interested in experiencing formats from a previous era.
• Seeking earlier or tactile methods of art production or paper arts, such as lithography, posters, or bookbinding.
• Interested in historical layout/design.
• Frustrated with accessing and using online resources.
• Who prefer a more tactile experience.
• Who wish to recall older styles.
• Wishing to see artistic techniques not reproducible online.

Patrons looking for historical images for reproduction are usually good referral candidates, too.

Situations where referral to historical societies is generally not preferable occur when people are looking for published scores or scripts for performance or commercial multimedia recordings or when they wish to do general research. Public and academic libraries have much greater holdings of these types of materials, and they would be more readily available at those institutions. Artists who want to do extensive database searches, especially for academic journal articles, would also do better in an academic or public library for that activity. Most historical society repositories would not have the budget for commercial subscriptions, especially because the majority of resources would not be related to their collecting focus. Lastly, patrons who must access materials remotely or need to check out materials and do not know specifically what they need would not be good candidates for referral. Online collections would serve them well, as would the research services (including making copies) available for a fee from historical society libraries and archives. However, physical collections generally do not circulate and must be used on site, eliminating use by these types of patrons. Reference librarians can use these suggestions to make referrals to historical
societies outside of their local area. Although one may not be familiar with the holdings of every society, knowing what they are likely to collect can help guide a patron to potentially helpful resources.

Promoting historical society repositories is another way to introduce creative arts patrons to these resources. Including historical society libraries and archives information in Web resources and marketing efforts alerts patrons to these sources with minimal time investment for staff. More involved ideas include collaborating with historical society libraries and archives in events, projects, programming, and grants and cross-promoting resources. Raab and Roth (2001) describes a successful, ongoing collaboration between a historical society and a university, and the Historic Pittsburgh Web site (http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/) illustrates the power of collaborative online content.

For those reference providers who are currently working at historical society libraries and archives, reaching out to other librarians and archivists working with creative artists is important in repository promotion, as well as in undertaking cooperative efforts like the ones described. Working to increase the visibility of and emphasis on the arts within the larger structure of the historical society will also advance awareness. There are also ways to reach out directly to the creative community to promote increased use. These include:

- Creating materials highlighting arts resources or the history of creative arts in the local area.
- Partnering with arts groups or other libraries that serve creative artists.
- Increasing digitization of arts materials, including audio-visual materials.
- Mounting exhibits based on artistic features of items rather than on historical significance of items.
- Increasing outreach and interdisciplinary efforts, such as arts to history students and history to arts students.
- Developing materials on how the arts influenced history and on how history influenced the arts.
- Hosting performances and offering research service to local art commissions.
- Investigating possible arts collecting initiatives, depending on your organization’s collection and acquisition policies.
- Pursuing arts, research, or digitization grants.

Historical society libraries and archives have a world of resources, inspiration, and expertise that can greatly enhance the activities of creative artists. By reframing their historical collections to appeal to creative artists and adding historical libraries and archives to the traditional repertoire of sources for artists, librarians, and archivists from all types of institutions
can enhance their services to artistic patrons by helping them find these remarkable hidden gems.

NOTES

1. In this article, the term creative artists includes all visual, literary, and performing artists, including those whose projects are historically based or documentary in nature.
2. Historical societies can be dedicated to subjects and locations; this article will focus on only those society repositories that are geographically based. The term library and archives will be used to cover all research repositories at historical societies.
3. The author was employed there from 2005–2008.
4. “Settlement houses were neighborhood centers where people lived in order to learn firsthand about the life of a neighborhood. They were located in the poorest areas of a city, often in immigrant neighborhoods” (University of Illinois, n.d.).
5. There are historical societies for all 50 U.S. states, as well as for most counties. Some large cities and neighborhoods may have one and some may not be based on current political boundaries (such as the Western Reserve Historical Society, which covers Northeastern Ohio).

REFERENCES


