

**Prospectus:
Consortium of Northeast Ohio History**

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Purpose

Northeast Ohio is exceptionally rich in important historical resources and collections among its major universities, libraries, and museums. Among the most notable of these are the Cleveland Public Library (one of the nation's largest and with ready access to the city's municipal records), Cleveland State University (housing a number of archival and archaeological resources including the Cleveland Press Collection), the Cleveland Visiting Nurse Association, the Western Reserve Historical Society (boasting scores of important regional collections), and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History (housing the Hamann-Todd osteological collection--the largest of its kind anywhere in the world). Some of these collections have already produced significant scholarly work, while others have only begun to be tapped by serious investigators.

As valuable as these resources are individually, however, there is even greater potential for innovative and interdisciplinary use of these materials. For example, using the municipal records of the Public Library, the health records of the Visiting Nurse Association and the Hamann-Todd collection, the osteological collections of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, the archaeological and newspaper records at Cleveland State, and the personal papers of early twentieth-century Clevelanders at the Western Reserve Historical society; it would be possible for a determined group of researchers to create an in-depth historical analysis of urban life in Northeast Ohio. Combining history, biology, and archaeology, such a project would produce a comprehensive insight into early twentieth century life unprecedented in its scope for any region in the nation.

The key to such an innovative program would be the formation of collaborative linkages between institutions and disciplines. Piecing together the complicated patchwork that was life in Northeast Ohio necessitates historians, archaeologists, and biological anthropologists sharing their expertise and methodological approaches with each other to a degree never before attempted. The potential avenues of research inherent in such a program are virtually limitless. For example, a pilot study currently underway at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History is

studying the effect that industrialization had on Lake Erie and the surrounding area by examining the levels of lead (and other heavy metals) in the teeth of lakeshore residents from prehistoric times to the present. Using archaeological, biological, and municipal records, this study is the first diachronic investigation of its kind, but is necessarily limited by factors including expense and numbers of investigators trained to interpret the collections and records being used.

Ironically, while such potentially extraordinary research opportunities await only the attention of dedicated researchers, many undergraduate and graduate students at Northeast Ohio universities acquire little or no experience in primary-source work in Ohio history, and even fewer opportunities to publish their research in refereed journals. These students are at a competitive disadvantage in an increasingly difficult market for professional historians and archaeologists.

With these opportunities and issues in mind, we propose the formation of a Northeast Ohio History Consortium among those institutions most vitally involved in the preservation and interpretation of Ohio History. As a clearing house of information between academic and public history institutions, this body would serve to share news of research opportunities and needs, link interested students with worthwhile research projects, and aid in the support and use of Northeast Ohio's rich historical resources.

Thus, the goals of the proposed consortium will be

- 1) to spur collaboration between institutions and cooperation among professionals from different disciplines in the study of Northeast Ohio history;
- 2) to stimulate the use of Northeast Ohio archaeological collections and historical archives;
- 3) to promote innovative approaches to historical, archaeological, and public history research;
- 4) to coordinate the effective use of research funding and resources;
- 5) to provide valuable research and publication opportunities to undergraduate and graduate students; and
- 6) to increase the profile and production of high-quality work in Ohio History.

Potential Institutional Affiliates

All institutions with major research collections would be welcome to join the Consortium. Potential members include, but are not limited to the following:

Institution

Departments

The University of Akron

Archaeology

Northeast Ohio Journal of History

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| | Archives History |
| Case Western Reserve University | Anatomy Anthropology History |
| The Cleveland Health Museum | |
| The Cleveland Museum of Natural History | Archaeology Archives Physical Anthropology |
| The Cleveland Public Library | |
| Cleveland State University | Anthropology History Special Collections Urban Studies |
| The Dittrick Museum of Medical History | |
| Kent State University | History Archaeology |
| Western Reserve Historical Society | |
| Youngstown State University | Archives History |

(Note: Participation in the consortium would not necessitate major changes in the curation and control of collections: these institutions and departments would preserve their autonomy in deciding how their collections shall be used).

Organization

The proposed body would be an affiliation of all interested major public history and

academic institutions with important collections and archives pertaining to Northeast Ohio History. Meeting twice a year, the consortium would bring representatives from each participating institution together to share information on collections, archives, research opportunities, or to discuss useful cooperation on current projects. Furthermore, the consortium would solicit and coordinate the use of research funds, organize major research projects, set schedules and timetables for the completion of sponsored research activities, and create outlets for finished research including conferences, colloquia, and publications on Northeast Ohio history.

Presentation of Research Results

The Consortium will aid in the presentation of research it inspires to the academic community and the public. In addition to the synopses of ongoing projects presented to the semi-annual meetings, the body may host colloquia, conferences, or museum exhibits open to all interested researchers and the public. The new Northeast Ohio Journal of History (starting in October, 2002) will serve as the main, but certainly not the only, publishing venue by which to disseminate findings to a wider audience.

In addition, the body will sponsor a special annual conference for students to present the results of their research, and open the pages of its journal to their research. Such outlets will provide rare and invaluable experience for the professional lives of the next generation's scholars.

Funding

As currently conceived, the Consortium would require little or no financial support in its early stages. Most participating institutions will already have necessary research facilities already in place, and potential researchers could be drawn from undergraduate students taking the equivalent of Akron University's 300-level Individual Study Internship. Gas, transportation, and small disposable items would be absorbed by the member institutions. As membership is voluntary, administrative work would be shared among the officers of the Consortium. If the body decides to launch a journal, it could be on-line and of almost negligible expense.

As the Consortium's role increases and larger projects are planned, financial grants would become necessary. Fortunately, a collaborative project encompassing several disciplines would have more potential sources of funding (for example, biological, archaeological, and anthropological agencies) than would be available to an ordinary history project (for example, the Ohio Academy of History, the Ohio Humanities Council). Furthermore, the Consortium

would have at its disposal the grant-writing abilities of a number of its members, and could solicit private funding for specific projects (for example, from the Firestone Company in support of research using its archives held at Akron University), or for University Research Apprenticeships--small stipends for undergraduate research work in the manner of those successfully employed by such institutions as Northern Illinois University.

Concluding Notes

The potential benefits of forming a Consortium of Northeast Ohio History are manifest, and such an innovative body could serve to foster the development of similar organizations nationwide. Nevertheless, the above proposal should be understood as a general guideline rather than a definitive organizational structure. The exact nature the body will take should reflect both the consensus of the participating institutions and the needs of the Consortium as it develops.