

**Community-Engaged Scholarship
Spring 2016 Proposal**

A proposal for

“Collaboration between Metro State students and East Side community members in researching the history of the Carnegie Library building at 1105 Greenbrier Street”

proposed by

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In June 2014, Peter Rachleff and Beth Cleary (Associate Professor of Theater and Dance, Macalester College) established a non-profit corporation, the East Side Freedom Library, and secured a fifteen year lease with the City of Saint Paul for an historic Carnegie Library building, which had served as a public library since 1917. Their project is to create a resource and programming center which researches, preserves, and presents the histories of immigrants, workers, people of color, and social justice movements. Rachleff and Cleary have been residents of Dayton’s Bluff since 1999, and they recruited a Board of Directors which includes Metro State faculty member, Tom O’Connell, and diverse community members. They also established a strategic partnership with such local institutions and organizations as the Minnesota Humanities Center, the Minnesota Historical Society, the University of Minnesota’s Immigration History Research Center, the Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library, and Metro State’s Institute for Community Engagement and Scholarship.

In the eighteen months since taking possession of the building, ESFL volunteers, under the direction of retired Metro State Dean Bruce Willms, have processed and cataloged more than 12,000 books in the Library’s areas of focus. ESFL co-directors have organized and hosted more than eighty programs, in which more than 3,000 people have participated. These programs have involved partnerships and collaboration with the Karen Organization of Minnesota, the St. Paul NAACP, the St. Paul Federation of Teachers, the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, Goodwill Easter Seals, Wellshare International, Freedom Schools, the St. Paul Public Schools Adult and Community Education Program, Ten Thousand Things Theater Company, Off-Leash Area Theater Company, Full Circle Theater, and the Friends of the St. Paul Public Library, among others. ESFL has also secured grants from the City of St. Paul STAR program, the state of Minnesota Legacy program, the F.R. Bigelow Foundation, the St. Paul Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and the Still Ain’t Satisfied Foundation, and has received support from more than a dozen unions and labor organizations. More than 500 individuals have made personal donations totaling nearly \$100,000, mostly in small contributions through three internet crowdfunding campaigns.

In 2017, ESFL leadership wants to celebrate the building’s centennial by producing a significant account of the building’s history. This account will reflect the ESFL’s perspective: It will focus on the community and its members. The key questions will be (1) How was it decided in the WWI era to approach the Carnegie Foundation to fund a new library in an immigrant working class neighborhood? (2) Who led the effort to secure the funding? (3) Who

was hired to do the actual construction work, and under what terms and conditions? (4) Who used the Library in its first iteration, and for what purposes? (5) Who sought the Library's renovations in the 1950s and 1980s, and who was employed to do this work? (6) How did the vision to *reinvent* the Library as the East Side Freedom Library take shape, and who has been involved in this process?

A team of community members has begun to form, under the leadership of John Sielaff, a local historian who was a leader on the "Who Built Our State Capitol?" project and has published several articles in *Minnesota History* and *Ramsey County History* about building trades workers and construction projects. With the involvement of Dr. Rachleff, they will be developing a work plan for research and the presentation of this research. This research will involve meticulous work in city directories, the manuscript census of population, local newspapers, tax records, and death records, as well as oral history. The format(s) for the presentation of the research – a pamphlet, a booklet, a video, a website – have yet to be decided.

The ESFL leadership is seeking participants for this research team. Like the cataloging team, which has included more than 25 volunteers and interns, the research team will include current college students as well as retirees. This has been a very productive mix for the cataloging process, not just getting the necessary work but constituting a complex and diverse community in which participants learn new skills and build new relationships. We expect to reiterate these demographics and dynamics in our research process, incorporating Metro students, St. Kate's Masters in Library Science students, Minnesota Historical Society "Museum Fellows," and undergrad students from Macalester, St. Thomas, and the University of Minnesota. *How* we get to our goal is every bit as much an intentional undertaking as *the goal* of an historical accounting of the building itself.

While this proposal strikes me as an appropriate project for the "Community-Engaged Scholarship" program, I am well aware that it seems odd (at the least) for me to be *both* the faculty member making the proposal *and* the community collaborator who will welcome and oversee the project itself. I intend to use my position as a community faculty member, teaching History 102-01: The American Past from 1865 in Spring 2016, and as a collegial member of the History Department, to recruit student participants directly and to solicit my colleagues to recruit students. My goal is to recruit two students who would be employed, through the grant, to provide 50 hours of work apiece during the Spring semester. I do not yet have any idea who these students might be.

Timeline

January 4, 2016 – I will submit a job description to History department faculty members.

January 12, 2016 – At the first meeting of my course, I will distribute a job description to all students registered in my course.

January 25, 2016 – The period of accepting applications will close.

January 26, 2016 – I will begin interviewing applicants.

February 1, 2016 – I will inform the two students that they have been selected.

February 8, 2016 – May 3, 2016 – Students will each work 50 hours, typically at 5 hours per week.

April 7, 2016 – I will report on our progress to the President’s Circle for Community Engagement.

June 1, 2016 – I will submit a financial report to the Institute for Community Engagement and Scholarship.

June 30, 2016 – I will submit a complete report to the Institute for Community Engagement and Scholarship.

The project of researching and preparing a narrative of the history of the Carnegie Library building will continue into the Fall of 2016, leading to one or more publically distributed products in early 2017. Metro State student participants will be invited to take part in the public release of these products.

Budget

ESFL is seeking support for the initial stage of historical research, to take place during the Spring 2016 semester.

Two Metro State students to work 50 hours each, compensated at \$15 per hour	\$ 1,500.
Honoraria for five community participants, at \$100 each	<u>500</u>
Total	\$ 2,000.