

ABOVE Director Oscar Micheaux, c. 1913, public domain BELOW Explorer Matthew Henson, 1910, courtesy of the Library of Congress



## Lincoln Motion Picture Company: Pioneers of Black Cinema

D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* launched the mainstream Hollywood film industry in 1915. Simultaneously, Griffith's viciously racist film sparked an epic century-long struggle for African Americans to establish an equitable and authentic voice and presence in American film. Over the years, CCAHA paper and photograph conservators have worked on more than one hundred items that illuminate this history.

In 2019, CCAHA received a singularly exciting project for the treatment of movie posters, lobby cards, press kits, and other ephemera from the early years of movie history. The smallest item in the collection could arguably be viewed as the most foundational. It was a stock certificate for 100 shares in the Lincoln Motion Picture Company (1916-23), the first formally incorporated Black-owned company established to film Black stories for Black audiences. It is a testament to the vision of the very earliest Black film pioneers. Their stories are largely forgotten today, with their businesses long-closed and most of their films lost. But if this was failure, it was heroic failure, probably inevitable in the face of massive social, legal, and economic obstacles. Their vision is still being fought for today, more than a century later.

Shortly after the development of motion picture film and projection in the late 1800s, filmmakers began to look for ways to effectively tell stories and market them to the public. Quickly overcoming their initial reputation as a novelty item, short films running up to twenty minutes in length soon demonstrated that the new medium could be an engine for generating income, potentially a lot of money. In 1915, film director D.W. Griffith created the template for Hollywood fame and fortune with his nearly 3 1/2 hour epic *The Birth of a Nation*. Crowds

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

## Building Capacity: The HBCU Library Alliance and CCAHA

Nine years before the first shot of the Civil War, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania was founded, now viewed as the nation's first still-operating HBCU (Historically Black College and University). As 100+ more HBCUs steadily opened—spread across 19 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—the academic libraries within the HBCUs found themselves serving as repositories for the historical documents of their faculty, alumni, and communities. Looking back now, many of these documents are true treasures. They record and preserve a history too long overlooked and disregarded.

The HBCU libraries and their archives offer irreplaceable documentation of the African-American experience in the 19th and 20th century centuries, reflecting the monumental themes of slavery, Civil War, Restoration, the Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, Black Lives Matter, and so much more. Complementing these broad themes, the HBCU special collections

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

2 LETTER FROM THE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

3 QUESTIONS FOR STEPHENIE  
SCHWARTZ BAILEY

5 ONLINE  
RESOURCES

8 EVENTS +  
PROGRAMS

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# LETTER

from the executive director

Dear Friends,

Cultural institutions, such as the ones served by CCAHA, play an important role in times like these by sharing the inspirational stories, cautionary tales, and wisdom and weaknesses of our ancestors in order to illuminate and inform current events. And what extraordinary and challenging current events we've faced recently!

The past year has been difficult and remarkable, marked by loss, change, and transformation. First and foremost, the staff of CCAHA wants to send everyone our continued best wishes for health and safety. So many people, including members of our staff and their families, have been touched personally by COVID-19. In the past year, our friends and colleagues on the West Coast experienced wildfires; our friends at institutions in the southeast battened-down for a destructive hurricane season; and millions in Texas were without power due to a powerful winter storm. In the middle of this global pandemic and natural disasters, communities throughout the U.S. were also raising their voices to bring awareness and advance our country toward being a more fair, just, and equitable society.

As I reflect back on this year, I am reminded of the important part our profession plays in preserving the memory of this time. In ten, fifty, or a hundred years, CCAHA conservators of the future will be asked to treat the archival records and art created during 2020. And the stories of our time will illuminate, inform, and likely raise interesting questions for our descendants. I hope they will find some wisdom and courage in the materials we leave behind.

Finally, I want to assure you that, as an organization, CCAHA has weathered the past year and is thankfully standing stronger than ever. Like most other organizations, daily life at CCAHA changed drastically in spring 2020, as our staff was forced to adapt to a new normal for an unforeseeable amount of time. They have responded so well to this challenge, developing a rich menu of online events and remote learning opportunities, conducting virtual assessments over Zoom, and successfully turning our annual Open House celebration into a Virtual Open House that was able to be viewed by friends worldwide. As we emerge from the pandemic, I want to thank all of you for your continued support, and we look forward to brighter days to come.

Sincerely,

Laura Hartz Stanton / Executive Director

Founded in 1977, the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) is a one-stop shop for every conservation and preservation need. CCAHA specializes in the treatment of works on paper, photographs, and books, as well as state-of-the-art digital imaging services. CCAHA's preservation services staff present education programs and conduct preservation assessments nationwide. CCAHA also offers conservation fellowships, fundraising support, disaster assistance, and more.

 [Learn more at www.ccaha.org/membership.](http://www.ccaha.org/membership)



# QUESTIONS

## for Stephenie Schwartz Bailey

*As Education Program Manager & Preservation Consultant, Stephenie Schwartz Bailey is responsible for developing and coordinating CCAHA's education programs and conferences, bringing preservation training to cultural heritage professionals locally and nationwide. We chatted with her about how she got her start in the field and how her job has evolved over the past decade.*

### **When did you start working at CCAHA? What brought you here?**

I joined the Housing and Framing department at CCAHA as a technician in 2009. At that time, I was flirting with the thought of pursuing a master's degree in art conservation but wanted more hands-on experience at the bench to make certain this wasn't a passing fancy. I had worked in curatorial positions and learned framing methods in the museum exhibition context. My most recent position before CCAHA was a historic automobile collection, where I realized how compelling the mechanics and materiality of an object can be in telling the story of an artifact's significance. But could I combine my interests into meaningful work in the conservation field? Almost immediately, I learned at CCAHA how preservation housing partners with conservation treatment to provide artifact stability and beautiful presentation. I was hooked!

### **How has your job changed over time? Has the expansion of CCAHA programs impacted your work?**

In 2011, I stepped into a role at CCAHA that incorporated more outreach and joined the Preservation Services Office (PSO) as Education Program Manager & Preservation Consultant. At that time, CCAHA offered about a dozen training sessions per year, but within two years our events calendar blossomed to include fifty-five programs per year! We were able to offer experiences to a wide variety of staff from museums, libraries, and archives in specialized formats

that included experiential learning (disaster salvage!), work with host-site collections during classes (within archival storage areas!), and hands-on process identification (print and photograph micro-examination!). PSO's national conferences and colloquia have always been a highlight of the CCAHA program calendar, presenting the most recent scholarship on topics in the conservation field.

In March of 2020, all our educational programming was converted to an online format. While initially this process seemed very daunting to me, the challenge has allowed for even more creativity in curriculum. Additionally, audiences can now join CCAHA from all over the world, with programs regularly uniting participants across time zones from the west coast of the US to Africa and the Middle East. When the chat box of a webinar lights up with international greetings, it is pure joy! CCAHA's network of preservation and conservation professionals has exponentially grown and deepened in mere months, a silver lining to the unexpected pivot in programming during a pandemic. Our common commitment to learning about saving cultural heritage has only strengthened.

### **What's been the most rewarding aspect of your work here?**

I feel most impactful to preservation education when I teach a hands-on workshop in which participants learn the significance of conservation-quality materials to artifact housings. We spend hours together reviewing the steps in constructing appropriate and attractive boxes and folios. It is a true "roll

up the sleeves" exercise! Housing is critical to long-term protection and access to collections objects, especially paper. Once I even made a one-inch-by-one-inch archival box for a special button in my personal collection, just to prove the point that no artifact is undeserving of an appropriate housing.

### **What are some of your favorite projects from your time at CCAHA?**

I have two favorite programs. The first, for reasons unfortunate but appropriate, was a Disaster Response & Recovery workshop. Although the audience was small, the outdoor workshop required enormous logistical preparation, as we simulated a water emergency. Wouldn't you know that day Mother Nature sent a surprise torrential rainstorm with high winds! We learned in real time that the best emergency preparedness practice requires patience and always expecting the unexpected.

At a second, less harrowing CCAHA conference in Buffalo, New York, on Preservation of Architectural Records, attendees were invited to tour the Darwin D. Martin House designed by Frank Lloyd Wright between 1903 and 1905. Here, we learned that major restoration of several interconnected buildings on the site relied on Wright's original plans and elevations. This experience wonderfully connected the dots for me between preserving a collection of precious paper renderings and manifesting the re-creation of a magnificent, historically accurate built-environment.

—JASON HENN

responded, money poured in, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson praised Griffith's achievement, and Hollywood tasted real power for the first time.

Noble Johnson, his brother George P. Johnson, Clarence Brooks, Oscar Micheaux, and others watched in dismay as *The Birth of a Nation* juggernaut smashed box office attendance records across the nation. They understood that D.W. Griffith's blockbuster was toxic to its core, awash in racist assumptions and historical inaccuracies. It openly promoted the vigilante terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan, a movement that had been losing power and influence in recent years. Within months of the release of *The Birth of the Nation*, the Klan was reinvigorated and openly spreading hate and terror again.

Ambitious Black men intrigued by the potential of film, the Johnson brothers (Noble and George), Brooks, and Micheaux, along with a handful of others, decided that the best way to respond to a film was with film. They grasped the inherent power of the medium and aimed to harness it. In 1916, Noble and George Johnson, actor Clarence Brooks, and a local pharmacist named James T. Smith formed the Lincoln Motion Picture Company and began making movies. Their first three movies—*The Realization of a Negro's Ambition*, *The Trooper of Troop K*, and *The Law of Nature*—were well received... in the limited number of theaters that agreed to show them.

In 1917, the influential Black newspaper *Chicago Defender* reported:

***“There is only one race film company worthy of the name, that is the Lincoln Motion Picture Co., Inc., of Los Angeles, Cal. It is distinctly a Racial proposition, owned, operated and financed by our people only—not a white person even being allowed to own one share of stock.”***

*An after-treatment reference photograph of the Lem Hawkins' Confession lobby card*

This was the dream: Black people making Black movies presenting Black stories. The stock certificate treated by CCAHA Paper Conservator Chloe Houseman preserves the early memory of that idealistic vision of a dream that would—for many decades following—be long deferred.

- The dream was deferred because so-called “Race Films” were intended primarily for segregated theaters and there were approximately 300 of these Black theaters in the US as compared with 20,000 white theaters. As an unwritten rule, the white theaters did not show Race Films. Therefore, with only 2% of theaters available to show their movies, only the most cheaply produced films could have any chance of turning a profit...
- The dream was deferred because a confusing patchwork of local censors in states and cities claimed the right to demand customized editing of the reels sent to their theaters, with their choices of offending scenes eliminated. And then people complained because the movies didn't make sense...
- The dream was deferred because the nouveau-riche mainstream Hollywood industry wanted Black actors in the background and they were willing to pay for them. Noble Johnson was a case in point. He starred in Lincoln Film's early productions and quickly became very popular. To bring in more money, he performed in mainstream Hollywood studio productions, playing roles like *Cannibal Chief*, *Slave Broker*, and *Nubian Servant*. Then Universal Studios requested that he sign a contract with a non-competition clause, effectively barring him from working with Lincoln, the studio he founded. Universal promised a good, steady income; Lincoln's future was financially uncertain. Noble Johnson signed the contract in 1918.

While this collection of film memorabilia was being treated at CCAHA, Senior Conservation Assistant Jillian Herrick Wilcox was particularly moved by a copy of *The Negro Motorist Green-Book*, an annually-issued (1936 to 1966) guidebook for African-American



travelers that received renewed public attention with the success of the Oscar-winning film *Green Book* (2018). For Jillian, the old guidebook brought back memories of the Green Book that her grandparents carried with them whenever they traveled. She has no idea what became of their copy.

Ephemeral items like the Green Book were designed for immediate use rather than long-term preservation. In most cases, they were quickly discarded. Because so few have survived, a chance encounter with a surviving pamphlet, movie poster, or lobby card can deliver an emotional jolt. For others, these items offer an unexpected glimpse of the world that our ancestors knew and experienced. In four cases, CCAHA conservators treated items associated with movies—*The Crimson Skull* (1922), *A Prince of His Race* (1926), *Black Gold* (1928), and *Brother Martin, Servant of Jesus* (1942)—where the original film is believed to be lost. In the case of the Lincoln Motion Picture Company, all seven of their films are lost, except for four minutes of deteriorated film footage from their last feature film, *By Right of Birth* (1921).

The movie posters provide particularly thrilling windows into the past. As Jillian says, “People needed these movies. They were inspirational, something they could take pride in.” She was particularly impressed by *The Flying Ace* (1926), an adventure movie from the silent era that featured a heroic Black aviator, fresh from World War I and ready to take on the bad guys. “A movie like this said that you are equal,” Jillian says. “You can fly, be an officer, you can do it.” CCAHA conservators treated the press kit for *The Flying Ace*, which spins creative ideas on how to promote the movie to local audiences.

The dream of an independent successful Black-run movie studio was strong in the silent years of the 1920s but faded with the arrival of sound (requiring an investment in much more expensive equipment) and the Great Depression. Pioneer Black film director Oscar Micheaux was the only figure from the 20s who stubbornly held on to his independent status, making ambitious if low-budget movies like *Lem Hawkins’ Confession* (1935) and *Lying Lips* (1939). CCAHA conservators treated a poster for *Lying Lips* and three lobby cards for *Lem Hawkins’ Confession*. (To see more, visit the CCAHA YouTube channel to view night four of our 2020 Virtual Open House.)

After World War II, the mainstream Hollywood studios began to cultivate a handful of African-American stars, such as Dorothy Dandridge, Harry Belafonte, and Sidney Poitier, maintaining just enough mainstream opportunity to keep an independent movement from taking hold. But while the casts were sometimes reasonably integrated, the large film crews working behind the scenes remained largely white. From this period, CCAHA conservators have treated the posters of such films such as *Cabin in the Sky* (1943), *Pinky* (1949), *Carmen Jones* (1954), *Anna Lucasta* (1958), and *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?* (1967). The poster for *Pinky* is particularly interesting, with a line bisecting Pinky’s face, one side subtly portrayed with white features and the other with Black, graphically suggesting the movie’s central theme of “passing.”

The most recent movie items treated by CCAHA conservators have come from the late 1960s and the 1970s, capturing a time when the dream of independent Black filmmaking finally returned. Acclaimed photographer and artist Gordon Parks led the way with his independent production of *The Learning Tree* (1969), an autobiographical look back at growing up in rural Kansas in the 1920s. While *The Learning Tree* failed to catch on at the box office, Parks’ follow-up film, *Shaft* (1971), was a big hit, cementing many of the key elements (hyper-masculine Black hero, heightened sex and violence, and funky soundtrack) of the new Blaxploitation genre. These films were usually made by mixed-race production outfits and marketed for urban African American audiences. From this period, CCAHA conservators have treated posters for *The Learning Tree*, *Black Caesar* (1973), *Coffy* (1973), *Isaac Hayes: The Black Moses of Soul* (1973), and *Cooley High* (1975). The poster for *Isaac Hayes: The Black Moses of Soul* (1973) memorably captures this moment in time, with Hayes looking like the coolest of superheroes, nearly fifty years before *Black Panther*.

## AUTHOR’S POSTSCRIPT AND CONFESSION

As one of the so-called “monster kids” who grew up in the 60s infatuated with the old “creature feature” horror movies regularly shown on TV, I’ve always felt like I’ve known all about Noble Johnson. He was the Skull Island Native Chief who proclaims “Ana Sabi Kong!” (rough translation: “She is the bride of Kong”) in *King Kong* (1933), and Boris Karloff’s sinister Nubian servant in *The Mummy* (1932), and Bela Lugosi’s treacherous henchman in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932). What more claim to fame could he possibly have?

Learning about this largely forgotten chapter of movie history has been a revelation for me. Noble Johnson was so much more than the Native Chief in *King Kong*. He was a courageous visionary who leaped at the chance to respond to the insult of D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*. He was determined to publicly proclaim racial equality in a mainstream American industry forty years before the Civil Rights Movement began. Within a span of just two years, Johnson founded a company that reflected his dream; he wrote, produced, and starred in three very well-received movies that refused to pander to stereotypes; and he shared his vision with others who kept it alive despite the aggressive resistance of a system determined to keep them out. His work and the work of many other unsung heroes—who stood up against all odds to demand a strong Black presence in Hollywood—is justly celebrated by the material legacy they have left behind.

Black films matter.

—LEE PRICE

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REFERENCES Oscar Micheaux & His Circle: African American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era; Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, and Charles Musser, Editors and Curators; Indiana University Press, 2016. // Oscar Micheaux: The Great and Only: The Life of America’s First Black Filmmaker by Patrick McGilligan; Harper Perennial, 2007. // Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance by Aberjhani and Sandra L. West; Checkmark Books, 2003 // Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity by Jacqueline Najuma Stewart; University of California Press, 2005



**ABOVE** Tigerbelle track team and Coach Edward S. Temple with medals from a 1958 meet in Moscow, courtesy of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Special Collections.

## The treasure held by HBCUs are astounding. Here's just a sampling:

- ▶ An original draft of *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin at the Atlanta University Center Woodruff Library (GA).
- ▶ Manuscript material covering Mary McLeod Bethune's remarkable career as educator and civil rights activist at Bethune-Cookman University (FL).
- ▶ Forty linear feet of manuscript and printed material relating to the life of 20th century poet and feminist Audre Lorde at Spelman College (GA).
- ▶ Manuscripts of W. E.B. Du Bois' speeches at Prairie View A&M University (TX).
- ▶ Documentation of the life of Edward S. Temple, legendary women's track coach who nurtured the athletic careers of 40 Olympic athletes including Wilma Rudolph at Tennessee State University (TN).
- ▶ A collection of New Orleans' festival costumes, including the elaborate costumes of the Mardi Gras Indians, at Southern University at New Orleans (LA).
- ▶ The Booker T. Washington Collections at Tuskegee University (AL).
- ▶ Documentation of the existence of over 800 former schools for African Americans in 15 southern states at Fisk University (TN).
- ▶ The archive of Matthew A. Henson, the first African-American Arctic explorer, at Morgan State University (MD).

also spotlight the contributions of individuals in countless fields—from science to politics and from arts to athletics—with the work of very familiar names preserved alongside lesser-known figures who nonetheless left material that can offer unparalleled insight into their time or area of expertise.

For more than a decade, CCAHA has been honored to work side-by-side with the HBCU Library Alliance, a consortium dedicated to strengthening the libraries and archives at 76 member HBCUs. Initially, CCAHA's photograph conservators joined a multi-institutional team who worked on a series of Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grants to upgrade collection stewardship of historic photograph collections at a selected group of HBCUs.

Then, in 2018, CCAHA's involvement with the HBCU Library Alliance took full flight with the collaborative development of a new of a new five-year program, *Building Capacity: HBCU*, with significant funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Mellon Foundation. Launched in 2019, the ambitious *Building Capacity: HBCU* program aims to support new preservation initiatives at all interested HBCU member libraries.

The HBCU Library Alliance and CCAHA are currently providing the first round of services competitively offered to ten HBCU libraries. The libraries will receive a mix of preservation needs assessments, emergency plans that address special collections, and collection surveys.

*Building Capacity: HBCU* stresses the importance of following a long-term incremental process for upgrading collection stewardship. It encourages all participating HBCUs to follow a recommended long-term strategy which builds from developing core documents—preservation needs assessments, emergency plans, and collection management policies to more specific projects such as digitization and rehousing. Nevertheless, this approach is always considered a guideline rather than a strict rule. If there are needs that require immediate attention, *Building Capacity: HBCU* allows for flexibility.

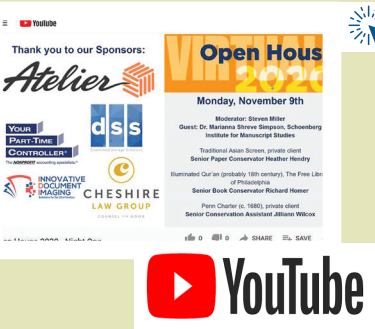
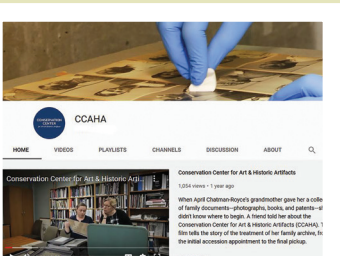
While the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have slowed the implementation of *Building Capacity: HBCU* in 2020, the first ten projects are offering an exciting start that will lay solid groundwork for important future work. As the HBCU libraries emerge from the COVID-19 restrictions, *Building Capacity: HBCU* will offer a strong incentive to build upon these opportunities, and continue to proudly share these important histories.

—JASON HENN & LEE PRICE

## ONLINE RESOURCES: LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ONDEMAND

As the world continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, we recognize that individuals and cultural heritage institutions are coping with many challenges. In order to make sure you have access to valuable information, helpful resources, and opportunities to develop and grow during this time, CCAHA is providing much of our online programming at low or no cost.

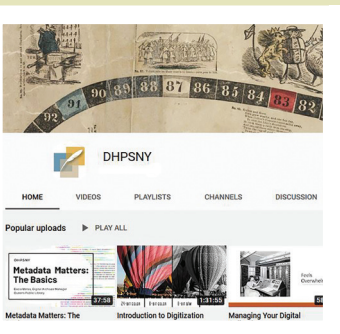
Beyond the live programming featured on our Events Calendar, we offer over 150 archived workshops, webinars, and other videos available to watch anytime, on demand, on The CCAHA and Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York (DHPSNY) YouTube channels. From our Fall 2020 Virtual Open House to our Digitization and Housing series, the opportunities available for personal and professional development are nearly endless. It is also easy to stream, save, and share videos and subscribe to our channels to never miss a new recording. Below are just a few highlights from CCAHA and DHPSNY channels.



### THE CCAHA YOUTUBE CHANNEL

With over 75 videos, ranging from short time-lapses of treatment to longer forums, instructional videos, and webinars, the CCAHA YouTube channel offers content for curious-minded individuals, cultural heritage professionals, and institutions alike. It's easy to curate your own preservation and conservation curriculum with recordings and from our conservators, preservation staff, partners, and collaborators. The channel offers 11 playlists of past programs and series, including *Community Conversation* series on remote alternatives to collections care during the spread of COVID-19, our *Putting Best Practices Into Practice: Scalable Preservation Solutions* series on scalable preservation standards and collections care; our *RHSP* series focussing on the Appalachian Region, Eastern Gulf Coast Region, and the Intermountain West Region; and our popular *Digitization 101 and 201* series of focused webinars that highlight topics related to digitization project planning and completion. Sessions can be viewed in order to be viewed as a series or according to subjects relevant to you.

>> [Learn more and subscribe at bit.ly/YouTubeCCAHA](https://bit.ly/YouTubeCCAHA)



### THE DHPSNY YOUTUBE CHANNEL

DHPSNY is a program that provides free planning and education services to collecting institutions in New York State. The DHPSNY YouTube channel offers an additional 50+ virtual learning opportunities for cultural institutions. A great alternative to face to face workshops, DHPSNY webinars address emerging issues and best practices, with content scaled to apply to small- and medium-sized organizations with limited resources. Playlists on the channel include the program's recent Board Governance webinar series, presented in partnership with the New York Council of Nonprofits, and its *2020 Common Collection Condition* series, presented by CCAHA conservators. Channel videos showcase a variety of topics, including administration, collections management, collections storage, digital preservation, disaster preparedness, and outreach. >> [Learn more and subscribe at bit.ly/YouTubeDHPSNY](https://bit.ly/YouTubeDHPSNY) and [dhpsny.org/webinars](https://dhpsny.org/webinars).



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# EVENTS + PROGRAMS

Throughout the year, CCAHA offers a number of programs to provide staff at collecting institutions with the knowledge and skills to support their collections care efforts. To register for any of these programs, please visit our website at [ccaaha.org/events](http://ccaaha.org/events).

**COLLECTIONS CARE TRAINING** workshops provide hands-on instruction in a range of topics for staff of cultural institutions. Major funding for these programs is generously provided by the William Penn Foundation, with additional support from the Independence Foundation, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and the Philadelphia Cultural Fund.

**PUTTING BEST PRACTICES INTO PRACTICE** is a two year program, generously funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, which offers bimonthly webinars to enable individuals and organizations all over the country to learn from experts.

Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the **REGIONAL HERITAGE STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (RHSP)** is an initiative of CCAHA that brings vital preservation services to regions of the country with limited access to conservators and preservation expertise.

## BECOME A MEMBER!

CCAHA membership is open to all nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations, including museums, archives, libraries, historical societies, academic institutions, state agencies, cooperative conservation programs, and private foundations. Benefits include \$125 credit towards a condition report, treatment proposal, and estimate; reduced rates for CCAHA-sponsored education programs; and a subscription to CCAHA's printed materials.

Learn more at:  
[www.ccaaha.org/membership](http://www.ccaaha.org/membership).