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Images available upon request.

Santa Cruz MAH Receives Two-Year Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services for the London Nelson Legacy Initiative

SANTA CRUZ, CA (August 22, 2023)— The **Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History** (MAH) is honored to have been awarded a grant totaling \$249,359 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The funding from IMLS will support the London Nelson Legacy Initiative, a project led by Santa Cruz resident, historian, and activist **Luna HighJohn-Bey** and developed in collaboration with **Santa Cruz County Black Health Matters Initiative** (SCCBHMI) and the MAH.

The London Nelson Legacy Initiative is a Black-led coalition that seeks to recover the stories of Black pioneers in early Santa Cruz, to contextualize their lives within the network of Black families that existed in greater California, to memorialize them for their role in the city's early development, to educate the community, and to serve as a model for similar projects.

"The underpinnings of erasure and inequality in legislation, statistics, income disparities, and home ownership are rooted in historical erasure," said High-John Bey, the project's lead researcher. "Restorative justice in historical research is about excavating the stories of Black and Brown communities from the margins of historical records, and revealing our stories in the tapestry of time."

In addition to HighJohn-Bey, the project research team includes **Gabrielle Middlebrooks and Lindsey Tavares-Sabido**. Other local collaborators include **Santa Cruz Equity Project, Researchers Anonymous, London Nelson Community Center, UC Santa Cruz Library's Regional History Project, and The Humanities Institute at UC Santa Cruz**.

As one of the area's leading cultural institutions, the MAH is an important partner in this initiative in several regards. It houses the historical archives where much of the research is taking place. It also owns and manages Evergreen Cemetery, where London Nelson and other Black pioneers are buried, and where a monument and grave markers ultimately will be placed. "We are thrilled to have received this transformative two-year grant from IMLS," said **Robb Woulfe**, executive director of MAH. "The initiative is important to us because we value historical truth and this research helps to bring hidden stories to light and create a more inclusive community."

As part of the multi-stakeholder and multi-phase effort, the project will create a full historical narrative for each of Black individuals buried at Evergreen Cemetery, along with history exhibitions, a documentary, a community celebration, a K-12 curriculum, a historic walking tour, and artistic interventions.

“This is an extraordinary, community-driven project formed to address issues of racial justice, starting with a re-evaluation and retelling of history by Black researchers and storytellers,” said **Cat Willis**, executive director of SCCBHMI. “Working this history and legacy into our public spaces, and our community’s school system, will be a part of the restoration, healing, and historic justice deserved.”

In addition to the IMLS grant, financial support for the London Nelson Legacy Initiative has already been secured from the MAH, SCCBHMI, and Community Foundation Santa Cruz County, who together provided some of the initial seed funding for the early stages of this project, which began in 2021. Additional funds are also being sought to expand the scope of the project and support future phases.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SCIENCES

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's libraries and museums. They advance, support, and empower America’s museums, libraries, and related organizations through grantmaking, research, and policy development. Their vision is a nation where museums and libraries work together to transform the lives of individuals and communities.

ABOUT LUNA HIGHJOHN-BEY

Luna HighJohn-Bey is the project lead, lead researcher, and inspiration behind the London Nelson Legacy Initiative. She earned her BA in sociology with a minor in philosophy from The New School, followed by an AA in business administration from DeAnza College. Following in the footsteps of her grandmother who was the first Black Woman Park Ranger, she worked for the National Park Service as a tour leader at the African Burial Grounds in New York City. She comes from a long line of family genealogists experienced in researching family histories.

ABOUT SANTA CRUZ COUNTY BLACK HEALTH MATTERS INIATIVE

Borne of an initiative from the Tannery World Dance and Cultural Center, Santa Cruz County Black Health Matters Initiative is dedicated to addressing the social determinants of health in the local Black community as a way to ensure that our whole community not only survives—but thrives. They accomplish this by raising awareness, connecting with community partners, sponsoring Black-led projects and initiatives, elevating Black entrepreneurs, and uniting all community members in shared celebration.

ABOUT THE MAH

The MAH is a thriving community gathering place that offers a full slate of art and history exhibitions, visual and performing artworks, public festivals, education and outreach programs, and cultural celebrations in collaboration with its many partners. It maintains a permanent collection of regionally significant art and artifacts, a research library, a historical archive, and historic sites including the Evergreen Cemetery, Octagon Building, and Davenport Jail. It is also home to Abbott Square, a vibrant public plaza on the museum’s doorstep that offers food, social events, and year-round creative happenings.

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