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Jennifer McNabb, Chair  
Department of History | University of Northern Iowa  
319 Seerley Hall | Cedar Falls, IA 50614

Warm Greetings Dr. McNabb and Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic interest in the tenure-track Assistant Professor of Public History position at the University of Northern Iowa, starting August 2025. I earned my Ph.D. in History from the University of Missouri in June 2024, with graduate certifications in Museum Studies and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). My professional experience spans a decade of teaching, public history leadership, and interdisciplinary research. My academic focus integrates early American history, the history of science, and economics. I bring a strong record of public engagement, digital history expertise, teaching and research to UNI's already vibrant history department.

My public history experience and skillset includes archiving, collaborative projects with house and midsize regional and local history museums, digital history, and community-driven sourcing and collection. As team lead for *Madison Historical*, a countywide digital archive, I supervised a team of undergraduate and graduate students. I provided training on the entire process of digital archival curation, resulting in the digitization and publication of more than 70 oral histories and five major source collections. This work involved cultivating and managing collaborations with museums, historical societies, and communities across the metro-east St. Louis Area. Ultimately, offering the public direct access to free digitization labor and knowledge while offering regional history and professional training on preservation and data collection to university students. Who then shared that knowledge with students across local schools through class visits and community partnerships. I hope to bring this type of hands-on engagement to Cedar Falls and its surrounds through partnerships with organizations like the Cedar Falls Historical Society.

In my role at the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration as an archive technician and preservationist, I honed skills in records restoration, preservation, public accessibility, and institutional collaboration. At the Campbell House, I contributed to the exhibition process from ideation and research to curation, installation, and deinstallation. My work with *Madison Historical* and the Haskell Monroe Digital Project provided hands-on experience in digital history methodologies, database management, and digital exhibit and article creation, bridging academic research with public audiences. I also developed expertise in project management, digital storytelling, and oral history collection, processing and digital restoration. This experience has prepared me to teach and mentor UNI students, equipping them with practical skills and careers in public history, museum studies, and history.

My teaching emphasizes experiential learning and interdisciplinary methodologies, like student created special topics podcasts and Instagram pages which foster the skills necessary to communicate effectively across multiple modalities but also to use those mediums and historical narratives in innovative and impactful ways. At the University of Missouri and McKendree University, I developed courses that connected rigorous

historical research with creative applications, in my historical methods course students explored special topics while learning digital analysis methods, they utilized traditional source analysis in small groups, but so too GIS mapping and qualitative network analysis to trace the movement of people, goods, and ideas across early America as a class integrating spatial history alongside digital tools.

In my course Home Sweet History, on the evolution and foundation of the structure and idea of the 'house' in America. Students learn about the built environment, material objects and the relationship between major events and changes to a conservative structure like the home over time. Students learn how to create detailed historic structures reports, work with local community members to document and contextualize existing residential buildings. Analyze architectural features, source civic archives for deed and ownership records, and explore potential justifications for landmark designation. This project emphasizes hands-on, skill-based learning and introduces students to the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of public history and local heritage work through the intersection of society and the home. Exemplifying the power of engaging students with historical materiality and public heritage through experiential methods.

Such projects bring academic scholarship into public spaces, showcasing the value of accessible and community-centered historical storytelling. At UNI, I look forward to teaching courses on early America, as much as public history, fostering partnerships with local and regional historical organizations. My aim is to mentor students in applying academic training to real-world contexts, developing expertise in archival research, material culture analysis, and public engagement to prepare them for careers in history.

My research explores the intersections of the history of science, economy and the environment within the broader framework of U.S. history. My book project, Reciprocities Market: Ecology and Economics of Early America, examines transatlantic botanical exchanges and their role in shaping early American ecological and economic systems. This project contributes to the fields of the history of knowledge production, emphasizing how the commercialization of natural knowledge as much as resources influenced both regional and global markets and minds. I plan to finish the spring semester with a complete book proposal in hand.

My publications include a co-annotated reprint of the 1846 serial *Legends of Mexico*, an award-winning article "Nature Much Improved," and four electronic encyclopedia entries. Forthcoming, I have a book review contracted with the Journal of Agricultural History. My research complements my teaching by integrating traditional archival methods with digital tools such as GIS and network analysis. Allowing student exploration of spatial and social networks alongside economic and eco-land developments. These methodologies deeply inform my pedagogy and provide students with opportunities to engage with interdisciplinary approaches in terms of tools and method to historical inquiry.

The University of Northern Iowa's commitment to public history education and community engagement aligns closely with my professional values and expertise. Community engagement has been central to my academic and public history work, a focus I hope to continue in Cedar Falls. As an executive board member of the O'Fallon, Illinois Historic Preservation Commission, I have contributed to landmark nominations, public outreach, cultural heritage initiatives, and produced videos, reports, memorials, and history tours. These efforts reflect my dedication to connecting academic work with public audiences, aligning with UNI's emphasis on collaboration. Thank you for considering my application, and I look forward to the opportunity to contribute to UNI's mission and the Department of History's vibrant community.

Sincerely,  
Shannan Catherine Mason, Ph.D.