

Lena Parsons  
LIS 782  
Board Proposal  
June 25, 2023

**Project Proposal/ June 25, 2023**

To: Bisbee Public Library Board of Trustees

From: Lena Parsons, Deputy Librarian and Archivist

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this proposal for a \$5,000 grant to expand our Library's local history collection. I look forward to discussing further; please do not hesitate to contact me with further questions.

**Introduction of Project**

Discover history! Explore the past! Bring in new patrons, users and donors!

There is no doubt that cultural heritage tourism is booming, but did you know that local history and culture can make our library a destination? An article by the Huffington Post mentions [bibliotourism could be the latest trend for tourists](#) where they experience many amazing libraries all over the world. Making public libraries a desired destination to visit while travelling will help in increasing library visits. But not only for tourists, local residents would increase library visits and expand the patron base with an expansion of the collection kept by the Bisbee Mining and Historical Society of the at the Bisbee Public Library in Bisbee, AZ.

Currently housed under lock and key and not generally accessible to the public, the Society collection consists of a handful of artifacts, documents, memorabilia and other ephemera from Bisbee's mining past. It is ripe for expansion as the last generation of Bisbee copper miners and families are dying and many are divesting their family homes. Further, community interest in the collection is growing as the Bisbee Public Library has noticed a marked uptick in patron requests for historical information and specifically asking about the collection, not understanding it isn't part of the library. The new history teacher at the high school developed a class module around local mining history as well, which has also spurred Library patron inquiries. Finally, the Bisbee Mining and Historical Society has indicated their interest in expanding the collection and making it available to library patrons as well as the Society's volunteer staff.

The Society has been collecting materials from local residents for almost fifty years and stores the collection in a closet at City Hall where volunteers - dedicated local history buffs but neither librarians, museum professionals nor archivists - open the collection up to visitors one Saturday afternoon a month. Membership in the Society is declining and collecting is waning due to availability and interest of members to gather it, not because of lack of materials in the community. And the recent fire at City Hall brought to light the poor warehousing of the collection and need to keep it appropriately preserved. Additionally, recent small, but no less disheartening, graffiti incidents have made some Society members less interested in sharing the collection publicly or even maintaining it.

As interest in the "American West" grows with continued tourism to neighboring Tombstone, AZ as well as border communities like Douglas and Nogales, the Bisbee Public Library and the Bisbee Mining and

History Collection are poised to bring in new visitors interested in learning the history of Arizona's first state capital, the once largest copper mine in the country and the stories of immigration and bi-country citizenship by the thousands of American and Mexican miners, laborers and others who build Bisbee to what it is today. A new public collection and collaboration between the two would set the library apart in the community and for tourists. By partnering with the Bisbee Mining and Historical Society to take over their small collection, inventory and catalog it and then create permanent and updated collections with it, the Bisbee Public Library can create the Bisbee Mining and History Collection.

## **Project Details**

### Rationale

Local history teaches people about their community - locations and objects in our community, places and heritage. Even somethings as mundane as names of streets, can reflect the long heritage of past generations of Bisbee. Currently housed under lock and key and not accessible to patrons, the collection of the Bisbee Mining and Historical Society is ripe for expansion. The Society has indicated their interest in expanding the collection and making it available to library patrons as well. Currently relying on an aging volunteer base, it will not be many years until the key volunteers of the Historical Society are no longer able to volunteer. Shouldn't we prioritize their knowledge now and work with them for that shift in knowledge base before it is too late?

By capitalizing on the knowledge of the Historical Society members combined with the expertise of an experienced archivist, the Bisbee Public Library can create a Smithsonian-level experience for visitors including:

- Bisbee, Cochise County and Arizona history
- Mining history
- Geological information
- Oral history
- Mining company documents
- Mine memorabilia
- Related ephemera

By telling the stories of how people reacted to family, community, corporate and social issues through the last 100 year, we can see how their responses shaped the city, state and nation and impacted the mining industry, immigration and public policy.

There is existing community interest in the collection already and expanding it and formalizing it will increase awareness and interest further.

### Community engagement

By referring to the three “C” themes community engagement - collaboration, consultation and communication, we can describe how community engagement can move up the ladder of participation with different community groups in Bisbee - retired miners, their families; other long-time families; new residents; school-age and young people; and tourists.

Key to engaging these community groups in the new Bisbee Mining and Historical Collection are relationship-building projects that help bring a community together and form stronger bonds; community education projects that provide instructional services or educate the public on certain issues; direct service projects that provide something to a group in need; and more.

Examples the Library and I could take on to engage the community in this collect include:

- Community meetings with Historical Society members
- Farmer’s Market info booth
- Roadshow of current collection
- Small-scale public relations such as local radio interviews and letters to the editor
- School presentations

Understanding why the community is engaged in a new project is just as important as engaging them in the first place. Through good community engage, we can build and sustain a cohesive community around the collection to better serve what residents and visitors alike want to see. Ensuring relevance is a driving factor to social change, and though this project isn’t explicitly social change, it is new for many in the community to see their history - and personal history for some people - as public history for the record.

### Collection Management

Once the new collection is in place at the main, downtown branch of the Bisbee Public Library, we will further promote it to attract visitors, as well as attract tourist visitors. The main branch of the Library is ideal to house this collection because it is in downtown Bisbee next to the post office where many locals already visit, and many tourists literally walk by every day. As the oldest, continuously operating public library in the state of Arizona, we already attract some tourists as well.

Recent upgrades to the building make it ideal for storing the collection in terms of environmental management and space. There is the newly remodeled, climate-controlled rooms and the collection would fit in one of the larger closets. In terms of public display, I suggest the majority of the collection initially be displayed in the foyer of the library where right now there are a few glass cases for displaying book recommendations but is otherwise mostly unused except for by tourists and school children dropping their bookbags before going into the library.

### Attracting visitors

The initial efforts to engage to the community in the collection described above will not alone be enough to attract a sustainable visitor population, though it will be a very good start. There are many ways we can initially attract visitors, locally and tourists:

#### Local:

- Bookmarks promoting the collection (already generated and available at the circulation desk)
- Local radio PSA (already generated through existing partnerships with the radio station)
- Farmers Market info book
- Float in parades (PRIDE, Fourth of July, Holiday Lights)
- Class visits from local students

#### Tourism:

- Sandwich board signs on streets
- Distributing bookmarks or flyers to local hotel and AirBnB managers
- Potential partnerships with other museums in town such as the Copper Queen Mine Tour

### Measuring success

In addition to attracting collection visitors, it is important for the success of the effort that new materials and stories continue to be donated. While we engage in these efforts, we will concurrently continue to collect new materials. Initially, a quarter over quarter increase in local visitors for the first year is our goal and then a 50 percent visitor increase during the tourist season for the next two years.

If we're not able to make these goals, we will immediately have to re-evaluate the presentation of materials and what is collected as well as to whom we're marketing. For example, the exhibit can be retooled to appeal to school groups or young people or to lean more to tourists if local, adults are not visiting.

### Project staffing

The Bisbee Public Library staff capacity has grown in recent years thanks to community support and federal grant funding for rural community literacy. Up to 10 employees now, the majority of the staff are responsible for library clerk duties and Bookmobile driving and managing throughout the rural and widespread community of Bisbee.

As the only trained archivist on staff and one of two staff members to hold a master's degree in Library and Information Science under the Head Librarian, I am uniquely qualified to complete this project. I also recently completed the Arrangement and Description Certification administered by the leading professional organization, Society of American Archivists, with an emphasis on local history. Finally, on a personal level, I was raised in Bisbee and have very close, long-standing personal relationships with many of the families in town who could support the Collection.

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Additional support can come in the form of high schoolers working for class credit or needing community service hours and material pick up from the Bookmobile drivers.

Finally, we will develop a new line of volunteers, tapping the members of the Bisbee Mining and Historical Society.

### Project Sustainability

In an ideal world, the Bisbee Mining and Historical Collection support is able to be folded seamlessly into the Library operations with one lead staff member (myself) leading the effort supported by occasional other library staff help, interns, volunteers and high school students needing community service hours.

As a new offering, the Collection will also serve as a fundraising and donation point for existing and new donors. In addition to building the collection and interest in the initial years, we will also have to seek additional, small-scale grant opportunities to support the collection. As the collections grows to sustaining, the budget supporting it can be folded into future public funding budgets.

### **Budget**

#### Launch

The \$5,000 grant will be budgeted thusly to get this Collection going:

- \$1,500 - display cases and appropriate storage for existing Collection
- \$1,000 - advertising, promotional materials, etc. to solicit new donations
- \$1,000 - scholarship/stipend for high school group who will assist with collecting of oral histories
- \$1,000 - advertising, promotional materials, etc. to launch first public exhibit of Collection
- \$500 - donation to Bisbee Mining and Historical Society as show of goodwill and partnership

#### Ongoing

As described above, the initial budget will come in-kind via current staff support and duties and grow proportionally with Collection interest via public and private funding.

### **Conclusion**

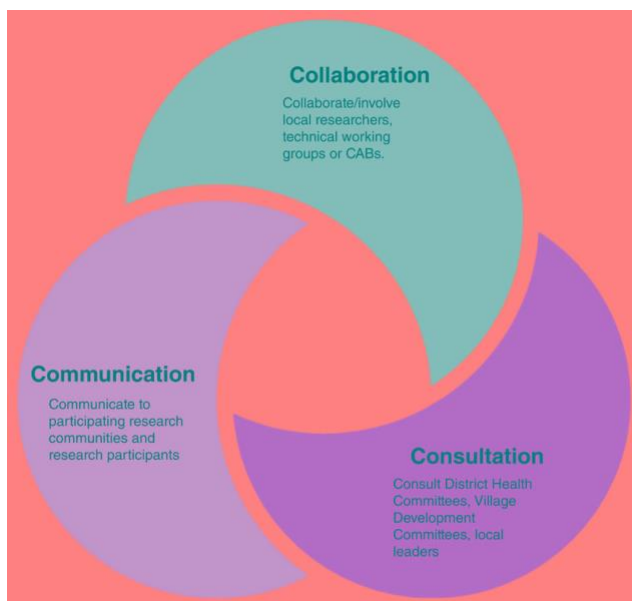
Thank you for your support of new efforts of the Bisbee Public Library and its staff. Without the support of the Trustees, the library would not continue to be the state's longest, continuously open public library while also adapting to new ways of doing business, serving patrons and the community, offering research and providing public service. Adding a collection like the Bisbee Mining and Historical Collection will add to the Library's world-class service with a Smithsonian-level institution. It will bring in

new visitors and supporters while honoring the community and the mine's role in establishing Bisbee for what it is today.

### Additional Resources

Please visit these sources for more information about building a collection like this in the library.

- [The Art of Relevance by Nina Simon](#) - free book and website. *The Art of Relevance* explores how mission-driven organizations can matter more to more people.
- [Bibliotourism: 7 reasons why tourists should visit the library](#)
- [Library Tourism Could Be The Next Big Travel Trend, The Huffington Post](#)
- [Arizona's Mining Attractions, Visit Arizona](#)
- [Why Libraries Have a Public Spirit That Most Museums Lack, Hyperallergic](#)
- The 3 Cs of Community Engagement



### Biography

Lena Parsons is a rebound Bisbee resident. A native of Bisbee and graduate of Bisbee High School, Lena recently returned to the community after 25 years away. She recently completed a Master's in Library and Information Sciences from Dominican University in River Forest, IL as well as an [Arrangement & Description \(A&D\) Certificate](#) from the Society of American Archivists. Prior to entering library science, Lena spent 25 years in public relations and community organizing managing campaigns and accounts for clients ranging from small budget nonprofits to multinational corporations. She has four children and cares for her elderly father, a retired Bisbee Public Schools teacher and 50-year resident of Bisbee.