Milford Museum

Delaware 250 Grant Application

Project Title: *The Colored Balcony* Documentary

Organization Description:

Our Mission

The mission of the Milford Museum and Landmarks Commission is to increase knowledge and appreciation of Milford's history by sharing research and collecting, preserving, and exhibiting artifacts that relate to our rich heritage.

Our Vision

Milford Museum aims to promote and support in all ways possible the preservation of Milford's defining historic and cultural resources, including historic structures, sites and collections. The purpose of the mission is to provide enriching entertainment and educational opportunities to all members of the Milford Community, for future generations and all other interested parties.

Our Programming

Last year, the Milford Museum began an American History Lecture Series which has become very popular. Held the second Saturday of each month at the Milford Public Library, the series has drawn more than 800 people to the programs that have been held so far.

The Milford Museum is also heading into the classroom. Recently, Museum staff and volunteers have started a Traveling Trunk program. This new program, structured for elementary school students, provides kids with the opportunity to compare everyday items from the past with today's mostly electronic world.

This year, the Milford Museum plans to start two online features— "This Month in Milford History" and "Milford Trivia." We work to ensure that our programming, both online and in-person, serves as a resource for our community by sharing the history of Milford in an interesting and unique way.

Project Narrative:

The Milford Museum is currently developing a documentary film titled *The Colored Balcony*, centering on the history of the then-segregated Schines Theater in downtown Milford and the experiences of those who attended it from the late 1940s through the late 1960s. The title refers to the only location in the theater where African American patrons were permitted to enjoy films and other acts hosted in the theater. The documentary is composed of three interview segments, an overview of the history of theater segregation in Delaware, as well as bookending segments by Milford Museum Director Tom Summers.

While many Americans are familiar with the concept of segregation as a dividing barrier in public and civic life, those that were not directly impacted may not link this history to that of the popular entertainment that they enjoy today. *The Colored Balcony* aims to recount the honest history of theater segregation in Delaware and reflect how Delawareans at the local level dealt with situations involving segregation of public recreation by including multiple interview segments with different eye-witnesses to this history. Oral history provides an opportunity to tell more honest stories about our past when other primary sources may be lacking, and such is often the case when recounting segregation at the local level. The interview format in the documentary directly reflects the ***Delaware 250*** idea of celebrating the "plurality of histories within the Nation and State."

Tom Summers serves as the host and interviewer throughout the film, providing the introduction and the outro for the final segment of the program. Summers also conducts a segment in the lobby area about how the architecture of the building, since its time of construction, included a specific wall section that held the lighted "colored" balcony sign.

During this segment of the film, Summers discusses the history of the two theaters on the site (the first one burned in the 1940s) with David Shockley, as well as the structure's history since it became a building for worship purposes in the late 20th century. David Shockley currently serves as the pastor of this worship center, called the Jesus Love Temple.

In another segment of the film, Summers interviews a group of African American Milfordians who grew up in the area. They share their memories of being forced to sit in the "colored" balcony. This period of time spans from the mid-20 century through the late 1960s. Because of the ages of the different participants, these memories will include a variety of the stories from different eras and reflect the changes taking place in the local culture and society overall.

The last segment of the film features an interview with Susan Dobson Hair. Hair, the daughter of a prominent Milford doctor, attempted to attend a movie at the Schines Theater in the late 1950s with a friend of hers, named Rosie, when both girls were about eight years old. Hair is Caucasian and Rosie is African American. They were prohibited by the theater manager from sitting together and subsequently returned to Hair's home on West Clarke Avenue in Milford. Upon her father's arrival at home that night, he drove the girls back to the theater and demanded that they be allowed to sit together for the movie. The staff relented, provided that the girls both sit in the section of the balcony reserved for African Americans. Hair states that the experience greatly impacted her life and emboldened her to undertake a life of activism.

The documentary also includes one segment with a local historian and author of *Historic Movie Theaters of Delaware*, Michael Nazarewycz. Though the film centers on the Schines Theater in Milford, Nazarewycz's segment contextualizes it within the wider narrative of segregation of public movie theaters throughout the state. To aid with this contextualization, the

narrative includes descriptions of concurrent events in Wilmington as well as in Kent and Sussex County. Nazarewycz emphasizes the role of movie theaters as community and civic gathering spaces, making the segregated nature of these buildings that much more impactful. He also highlights the exceptions to the rule: such as the Hopkins Theater in Wilmington that was open to all but specifically catered to African American patrons.

In consideration of this, the anticipated audience of the documentary includes residents of Milford, as well as Delaware at large. First, the documentary will be screened to local residents of Milford. This showing will take place in the same location as the events of the documentary: the auditorium of the Jesus Love Temple, the former Schines Theater. The museum is expecting a large turnout.

As of March 22, 2024, the Milford Museum's most recent guest speaker event, "The Disappearance of Amelia Earhart," drew a crowd of 176 people on March 9. This event took place in the Milford Library and was attended at absolute seating capacity. Given that Jesus Love Temple seats several hundred, the museum expects an audience of at least 200 people. After the screening, the film will be made available on the Milford Museum's website as well as on social media (including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) for free, allowing it to benefit a wider audience of Delaware residents.

While the story of America's racism and segregation started in the early colonial history of the nation, this project will reveal how these issues were being addressed nearly two centuries later at the personal and local level during one of the most turbulent time periods in the struggle for a "more perfect union." *The Colored Balcony* features diversified viewpoints and proper contextualization of underrepresented history, resulting in an educational resource for both residents of Delaware and anyone interested in the history of the state.

Project Budget:

Setup/Filming Time

- Setting up cameras, audio equipment, and breaking down after each shoot. Multiple locations over 3 separate days.
- **8 hours at $60 per hour = $480**

Production Time

- Video Editing: Editing the separate videos together into a cohesive story with multiple shots, B-roll, and images
- Clerical work: Emails, phone calls, production meetings, scouting, etc.
- **12 hours at $60 per hour = $720**

Equipment Rental

- Camera 1 - $115
- Camera 2 - $145
- Lens 1 - $75
- Lens 2 - $55
- Tripods x2 - $60 = $120
- Wireless microphone system - $60
- SD Cards x2 - $30 = $60

TOTAL Setup/Filming + Editing + Equipment Rental = $1,830

STATE OF DELAWARE
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL
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March 26, 2024

Re: Delaware 250 Grant Program

Dear Executive Committee,

I am writing to you to highly recommend the approval of the Delaware 250 grant that the Milford Museum is submitting for the development and completion of the segregated balcony film. The film will focus on the area of the Schines Theater, in Milford Delaware, where African Americans were forced to sit when they attended movies and other events.

With segregation of the theater not ending until the late 1960s, this film will be critical in capturing the memories of those individuals who have firsthand accounts of being segregated to the balcony. In addition, I understand the film will provide additional information about segregation in theaters throughout Delaware, and the efforts on the national and state level to eventually desegregate these public gathering areas.

I strongly encourage you to approve the requested financial resources for this project to provide the public with an important reference tool about a little-known segment of the civil rights struggle. This film will present younger generations of students with information about the society and culture in which their ancestors lived.

Sincerely,

Mike Tholstrup, AICP
Planning Manger

Milford
PUBLIC LIBRARY

March 25, 2024

Executive Committee of the
Delaware 250 Steering Committee
c/o Margaret Hughes

As the Director of the Milford Public Library and a native Milfordian, I strongly recommend the approval of this Delaware 250 grant request by the Milford Museum so they may create a film about Delaware's journey through the nation's civil rights struggle filtered through the lens of Milford's Schines Theater and the segregation policies they enforced. While segregated theaters existed throughout the nation, few Milfordians understand that their local movie theater, right downtown, segregated its attendees by race.

This period of history, from the construction of the theater in the late 1940s until the desegregation of the theater in the late 1960s, is a critical era in our nation's history highlighted by the struggles endured by persons of color and the key moments that led to desegregation.

This film will not only capture the history of the theater but will feature first-hand interviews with individuals who were forced to comply with these revolting practices. This film will also reveal how the First State and the nation, eventually desegregated public spaces, no longer bound by the hateful policies of the past.

I sincerely believe this project aligns with Delaware 250's overarching theme to "cultivate a deeper appreciation for Delaware's history among state residents and visitors, so we may celebrate and inspire the next generation," of historical caretakers. As a physical neighbor and frequent partner of the Milford Museum I'd like the committee to consider the beneficial impact this project will have on adjacent local organizations.

I anticipate working with the Milford Museum to provide spaces for the film's public viewing, the opportunity to highlight the library's related resources, and a chance to connect with historically underserved community members. This film has the potential to create meaningful, intergenerational connections between Milford residents of all ages and races and will provoke thoughtful civil discourse.

Thank you for your thoughtful deliberation.

Sincerely,

Lea Rosell, MLIS
Executive Director

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