Gandy Dancer Bluegrass Festival
Community History HEX Scholar
Deadline: October 2, 2023

Background:
The Gandy Dancer Bluegrass Festival is an annual one-day music event that takes place in Mazomanie, Wisconsin, and is organized by the Mazomanie Charitable Alliance. The festival features musical performances by locally, regionally, and nationally recognized bluegrass artists along with family-friendly activities, rides, and educational exhibits. By referencing the “gandy dancer,” a slang term for early railroad workers in the United States, the festival invokes multiple aspects of Mazomanie’s rich history. Festival organizers have long hoped to develop a public presentation or exhibit that roots the festival in this rich history via this namesake.

Project Description:
The Gandy Dancer Bluegrass Festival organizing committee invites the participation of a UW-Madison student who is interested in drawing on local resources—from the local library and the Mazomanie Historical Society to local podcasters and the wealth of knowledge embodied in community members—to develop a public history project. The project would include a public display, exhibition, or presentation of an exhibit to accompany the 2024 festival on the 3rd Saturday in August. The exhibit scope and design will be created in collaboration with the festival organizing committee. The student will work directly with Megan Bailon, a current member of the Gandy Dancer Bluegrass Festival organizing committee, throughout the course of the project. This project will run from January 2024-August 2024.

Some directions that the project could take include, but are not limited to:
- Wisconsin rural history
- Midwest railroad transportation history/present
- Manufacturing and industrial histories
- Circus performance histories/present
- Generational understandings of local history
- Local/Regional Indigenous histories

Possible forms for the exhibit could include, but are not limited to:
- A website
- Display of physical materials in a local community space
- A video or audio display of work in progress
- An interactive outdoor exhibit geared toward adults and/or children
Responsibilities & Expectations:

- Engage with local institutions and community members as needed in support of the project. This may include collecting oral histories if the student is interested.
- Review archives to survey what is available that might provide context or otherwise complement oral histories collected.
- Create an exhibition of work and progress for the festival, guided by own interests and expertise.
- Meet with project supervisor, Megan Bailon to set goals, report, review, and support progress & communicate any issues or concerns regarding the project in a timely manner.
- Attend or report to the Gandy Dancer Bluegrass Festival organizing committee at monthly organizing meetings with brief updates on project progress.
- Be present at the festival.
- Provide a brief executive summary of progress made to the Mazomanie Charitable Alliance at the end of the project.
- Meet with Public Humanities Program Coordinator, Danielle Weindling 2-3 times over the course of the project to discuss project development and identify professional development interests and opportunities.

Proficiencies Desired:

- Experience, training, and/or research related to the collection of oral histories.
- Professional, direct, and effective communication skills.
- Ability to set priorities, create independent or collaborative work plans, manage deadlines, and be flexible and creative with a project as it transforms.
- Previous research experience related to Wisconsin history and/or the possible themes described above.

Please submit a resume, transcript (unofficial), and 1-2 page cover letter that describes:

- your academic area of focus, why you are interested in the project, what themes are of particular interest, any experience you have related to the exhibit component of the project.

All materials should be submitted as a single PDF file titled, Name_GandyDancerHEXApplication and emailed directly to bailon@wisc.edu & applications@humanities.wisc.edu by Monday, October 2, 2023.

If you are interested in the project but are not quite sure how your experience or areas of expertise might fit, don’t hesitate to reach out to Megan Bailon (bailon@wisc.edu) in advance of the due date to discuss.