

The History Center in Tompkins County Awarded Prestigious Grant from the National Archives

The National Historical Public Records Commission, a branch of the National Archives and Records Administration, announced the award of a Public Engagement with Historic Records Grant of \$132,946 to The History Center in Tompkins County in support of *HistoryForge*, a dynamic way to explore local history using census records and historic maps.

Rod Howe, Executive Director of the History Center, states that “This award is an impressive achievement for a small history center and a tribute to three years of hard work by the project manager, Bob Kibbee, the web developer, David Furber, History Center staff and the hundreds of volunteers who have worked on the project over those years. Special thanks to Julia Corrice from the South Central Regional Library Council for developing a convincing metadata plan for the grant proposal. We are already using *HistoryForge* to back our popular programs exploring neighborhoods and ethnic and professional groups and look forward to using the grant funds to continue to develop this powerful new way of exploring our local history.”

Bob Kibbee, who is both a trustee and project manager adds, “This grant will allow us to develop *HistoryForge* intensely over the next two years. The great work of the past three years has given us a platform to launch a more powerful version of *HistoryForge* with exciting new features and a more user-friendly interface. The grant will also give us the resources to present *HistoryForge* as an open source program any community can adopt for its own use.”

After a year of development *HistoryForge* will be tested by at least three partners. Two New York state partners have already committed: the Chemung Valley History Museum and the Oneida County History Center. “This is a great opportunity,” Kibbee noted, “to test our model on some larger communities. And it’s a great opportunity for collaboration and exchanging ideas for moving forward.”

HistoryForge is a web environment that allows users to explore local history in a new way—the focus is on individuals, families and neighborhoods. A group of dedicated volunteers is transforming hand-written census records of Ithaca from 1900 to 1930 -45,000 records so far-- into a database that can be used to explore ethnicity, professions, homeownership and many other elements that defined and represented the lives of ordinary people in the early 20th century. You can use the working prototype of *HistoryForge* at <https://historyforge.thehistorycenter.net>.

Try the “Map It” feature that “supercharges” several layers of historical maps for displaying your search results. Or just use the opacity slider to see how Ithaca has changed over the years.

The grant from NHPRC will augment this basic platform with user-generated content, people and buildings linked across time, dynamic use of archival records and many other features.

Rich John, a Tompkins County legislator and a trustee, commented, “This is the perfect complement to the re-situation of The History Center in the Tompkins County Center for History and Culture. *HistoryForge* re-situates the organization in the online world. We’re grateful to the NHPRC for recognizing the potential.”

HistoryForge was launched three years ago. Bob Baxter and the Dryden Mutual Insurance Company provided seed money for initial development. The Triad Foundation, the Tompkins County Bicentennial Commission and the trustees of The History Center have provided additional support. “This grant from a national agency is an affirmation of the exciting potential the project has,” noted Howe, “and provides a

great opportunity for this history-minded community to develop our local HistoryForge and offer the same potential to communities across the country.”