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Mackinac State Historic Parks Awarded Grants for Fort Mackinac Reading Room and Microfilm Reader

MACKINAC ISLAND, MICH. — Mackinac State Historic Parks is excited to announce it has received two grants for upcoming projects: \$146,948 from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) for a new Reading Room exhibit at Fort Mackinac, and \$3,000 from the Mackinac Island Community Foundation to help cover the cost of a microfilm reader.

The reinterpretation of Fort Mackinac’s historic reading room and school building has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom.



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This project will reinterpret the original 1879 reading room and school building at Fort Mackinac to better represent its appearance in the 1880s, and create a new exhibit focused on the immigrant experience in the U.S. Army of the late 19th century, army reforms, and education at Fort Mackinac. Reading rooms and schools such as the one at Fort Mackinac were part of army-wide efforts to educate enlisted soldiers, nearly 50% of whom were immigrants in the post-Civil War era. At Fort Mackinac, soldiers from 22 countries served between 1867 and 1895. Using an updated 1880s period setting, interpretive panels, and digital elements allowing visitors to read original newspapers and periodicals, this

project will interpret the education of Fort Mackinac’s soldiers, the reasons immigrants enlisted and how these soldiers fared once in the military, and how the U.S. Army reformed itself to better serve soldiers and the American public.

“This exhibit will introduce our visitors to the immigrant experience in the U.S. Army of the late 19th century, army reforms, and education at Fort Mackinac,” said Mackinac State Historic Parks Director Steve Brisson said. “We’re grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for providing us funds to help further our mission of presenting Mackinac’s rich history.”

In addition, Mackinac State Historic Parks was awarded \$3,000 from the Mackinac Island Community Foundation’s Preservation of Historic Documents Fund and the Island Community Needs Fund to purchase a new microfilm reader.



Mackinac Island

community foundationSM

This reader will allow MSHP staff, researchers and the public to access the variety of records stored on microfilm in the collections owned and housed by MSHP. These records include historical collections of notable people of Mackinac Island, local business history, records of fur traders, as well as the most recent addition of multiple years of the Mackinac Island Town Crier (generously funded by MICF and Mackinac Associates). It is important that these records continue to be accessible to MSHP staff in furthering their mission and allowing staff to access needed information for exhibits, presentations and publications. A variety of researchers use the MSHP collection as well ranging from professionals from other museums to students working on research for their degrees.

“We’re grateful to the Mackinac Island Community Foundation for providing us with this equipment to provide better access to this important collection,” Brisson said.

The reading room will open with the rest of Fort Mackinac for the 2022 season on May 3. The microfilm reader is scheduled to arrive to the Keith R. Widder Library at the Petersen Center in Mackinaw City by mid-February. It will be available for use by appointment. More information can be

found about Mackinac State Historic Parks at mackinacparks.com. A downloadable version of this release can be found [here](#).

Mackinac State Historic Parks, a family of living history museums and parks in northern Michigan's Straits of Mackinac, is an agency within the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Its sites—which are accredited by the American Alliance of Museums—include Fort Mackinac, the Biddle House, The Richard and Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, Historic Downtown Mackinac, and Mackinac Island State Park on Mackinac Island, and Colonial Michilimackinac, Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park and Michilimackinac State Park in Mackinaw City. Mackinac State Historic Parks is governed by the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, established in 1895 to protect, preserve and present the parks' rich historic and natural resources for the education and recreation of future generations. Visitor information is available at (231) 436-4100 or online at www.mackinacparks.com.

“Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in the reading room exhibit, do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.”

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