

April 16, 2019

To the Emeryville City Council:

Though I wish I could attend tonight's meeting, I cannot due to a childcare issue. This letter is intended to express my support for the Emeryville Historical Society and for the award of a community grant that would enable them to continue their work and grow their connections within the Emeryville and larger East Bay community.

I've been fortunate to sit down with members of the Emeryville Historical Society (EHS) on a number of occasions to discuss the current state of their collection, their collection management plan, and their goals for sharing these valuable assets with the community. The more I have learned about their processes and plans, the more I see how valuable their work is, and how much potential lies in their collection and their passion.

The heart of EHS's educational goals lies in their incredible collection of photographs and neighborhood ephemera. In their current state of storage, these assets are at risk of damage or loss due to environmental factors, current storage materials, and age. Time can be unforgiving, and without the proper tools, photographs are particularly vulnerable to the effects of age, light, and temperature. This grant would ensure that these photographs and other paper-based materials are housed according to archival standards for their long-term viability. Working towards solutions for long-term viability would ensure that the residents of Emeryville continue to have access to a rich resource of their community's shared history and memories.

On a larger scale, I believe that this grant will aide tremendously in EHS's goal of ensuring that the residents of Emeryville have access to this resource without obstacle. EHS has been working to digitize their collection for the benefit of the public, but the current system is not sustainable in terms of technology and process. The grant would allow them access to professional resources that would assist them in developing a plan to facilitate the digitization of the assets using professional best practices with community access in mind. Using these tools, EHS would have the capacity to grow their programs, reach, and community impact.

EHS seems to feel strongly that history should be a shared resource and a shared process--a sentiment with which I agree. Working with tangible history gives people an opportunity to learn about their community and themselves. EHS's plan to invite teens and senior citizens to participate in their process is incredibly valuable. Facilitating public history projects not only passes along valuable skills (digital imaging, descriptive writing, etc.), but empowers citizens to take control of their own narratives and participate in something much bigger than themselves. I would not be surprised if after working with EHS on such projects, local high school students become more interested in local history and the process and importance of archival work. Senior citizens, too, may realize that their experiences matter and may be encouraged to share their stories—a process that has tremendous benefits for recipient of the story as well as the story teller.

Our digital world can sometimes make us think that the burden of preservation of images, stories, and lives is largely eliminated. Images and stories are easily shared and stored on social media, posted on websites, and shared with the click of a mouse. However, this method of transmission is neither sustainable nor reliable. I fear what might happen when accounts close, digital trends pass, and personal websites are removed. If EHS is not able to secure their collection in such a way that it remains freely accessible to the public, those valuable assets risk being misinterpreted and lost to the deep archives of the internet.

As a local resident, museum scholar, and practicing museum professional in the field of collection care, I wholly support EHS's application for grant funding to ensure the longevity of their collection and sustainability of their work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Iliana Morton".

Iliana Morton

---

*B.A., History-* California State University, San Marcos

*Graduate Certificate: Library Sciences* (Archives emphasis)

*M.A. Graduate Student-* Museum Studies, Harvard University

*Registrar-* Camron-Stanford House Museum

*Board Member-* Emerging History Professionals Committee, American Association of State and Local History