Media Release

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HISTORIC SARANAC LAKE WINS MAJOR GRANT FOR NEW MUSEUM EXHIBIT

Saranac Lake, NY, August 19, 2024 **—** Historic Saranac Lake (HSL) announced that it has been awarded a major grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to support a new museum exhibit presenting the history of the Saranac Lake region. The $250,000 Museums for America (MFA) Grant supports the design, fabrication, and installation of new exhibits in HSL's expanded downtown history museum.

“We are thrilled to receive support from this very competitive and prestigious program,” said HSL’s Board President, Amy Jones. “This is a huge vote of confidence in our vision for the new museum campus and our capacity to complete this major project.” HSL is in the company of 21 other major museums in New York State to win an MFA grant, such as Adirondack Experience, the George Eastman Museum, Museum of the City of NY, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Intrepid Museum.

In 2020, HSL embarked on a multi-million dollar expansion of their Saranac Laboratory Museum, with the purchase of the neighboring historic home and medical office of Dr. E. L. Trudeau. The $5.3 million rehabilitation project is on track to be complete by the end of this year. Funding has come from private donations, foundation grants, ten different state and federal grants, and historic preservation tax credit financing. “With the end of construction in sight, we are excited to get to work on the exhibits so we can open the new museum to the public,” said Executive Director Amy Catania.

The new IMLS-funded project builds on earlier exhibit planning. In 2023, an IMLS Inspire! Grant of $50,000 supported planning for the new exhibits. HSL worked with a team of exhibit design professionals to create the schematic design for the exhibits in both museum buildings. In the next project phase, HSL will work with the designers to elaborate on the schematic design, creating the full exhibit narrative and defining and fabricating the interpretive elements.

HSL’s Archivist and Curator, Chessie Monks-Kelly explained that the new building provides the space to tell the broader story of the Saranac Lake region, before and after the story of tuberculosis and beyond the borders of the Village of Saranac Lake. “It’s incredibly rich history,” said Monks-Kelly. “We are excited to bring alive so many human stories, like the history of the Black settlers in Franklin County and the stories of many people who came to the region seeking a cure for tuberculosis.”

“The overarching narrative is the natural environment,” said Program Coordinator Alex Krach. “The unique environment of the Adirondacks shaped the lives of the people who have called this area home, starting with Indigenous people who have lived here for thousands of years. The interplay between the natural world and the humans who live here is at the heart of the history of our region. From hunting and logging to tuberculosis, it was the natural environment that drew people here, and it continues to do so today.”

A Humanities New York grant is supporting consultation with David Kanietakeron Fadden of the Six Nations Iroquois Cultural Center in Onchiota on an exhibit that introduces visitors to Indigenous history and culture in the region. “We are honored to be partnering with our colleagues in Onchiota,” said Catania. “Our goal is to inspire curiosity among visitors about the rich Indigenous history of our region and make sure they visit the museum in Onchiota, which is also planning a major expansion.”

Monks-Kelly and Museum Specialist Emily Banach have been working hard to prepare for the museum expansion by steadily growing and cataloging the museum collection. They are excited to move into the new facility, where there will be a research room for the public to access the collection.

With construction wrapping up soon, HSL is raising funds for the second phase of the capital campaign for the museum expansion. HSL’s “Three Pillars” Campaign is raising $1million for the museum exhibits, $1million for handicap accessibility at the Saranac Laboratory, and $1million to grow the HSL endowment fund. To-date, HSL the campaign has raised over $930,000.

“We are committed to opening a museum that is engaging for people of all ages, for all residents and visitors,” said Catania. “We are pleased to have support from Stewart’s Foundation to create child-friendly exhibits.” A special exhibits space on the second floor will encourage return visits by featuring rotating exhibits, including changing exhibits about Winter Carnival each winter. This special exhibit room will often feature artifacts on loan from a private collector who is generously partnering with HSL on the exhibit space.

The Museums for America program is the largest museum grant funding opportunity offered by IMLS, an independent federal agency. This funding round awarded grants to 115 museums across the country.“IMLS remains committed to serving the museum field and furthering the goals of the American public,” said IMLS Acting Director Cyndee Landrum. “The Museums for America program encourages applicants to be creative in their response to challenges, and to envision a bold future for their institution.”

Founded in 1980, Historic Saranac Lake is a not-for-profit architectural preservation organization that preserves and presents area history and architecture to build a stronger community. The Saranac Laboratory Museum is open year-round, Tuesday-Saturday, from 10am to 5pm.

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Images, courtesy of Historic Saranac Lake:

1) Historic Saranac Lake Logo

2) Exhibit Rendering: Trudeau Building

3) Exhibit Rendering: Front Parlor

4) Exhibit Rendering: Outdoor Recreation

HSL HISTORIC SARANAC LAKE






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