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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A Tools for Discovery grant funds digital letters pilot project at IHRC

MINNEAPOLIS, Minnesota (06/22/2010) -- The Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) at the University of Minnesota has received a \$4,000 Tools for Discovery grant from the U's College of Liberal Arts for a project titled "A Heart Connects Us: Immigrant Letters and the Experience of Migration."

The grant supports work by the IHRC on a pilot project to digitize, translate, and create access online and through an exhibition to letters written by immigrants in North America. The online version was completed in May 2010, with assistance from an undergraduate researcher funded by the grant (www.ihr.c.umn.edu). Additional student research supported by the CLA-OIT grant will help staff create an exhibition for spring 2011.

"Our vision is to create access to resources for a diverse group of scholars, students, and general readers who want to understand and compare migration across traditional scholarly boundaries," said Donna Gabaccia, director of the IHRC and Rudolph J. Vecoli Chair in Immigration History.

The IHRC's larger project is titled "Digitizing Immigrant Letters" and focuses on providing a way for scholars to study the spread of literacy and its effect on transnational human relationships, as well as identities and networks of intimacy during separations. "The rhythms of writing and reading differed in their emotional and identity outcomes from the more extensive and instantaneous compression of time and space that is now possible," said Sonia Cancian, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Postdoctoral Fellow affiliated with the IHRC and off-site director of the project. The project team is comprised of Cancian, IHRC staff, student researchers, and language volunteers, with support from the Digital Collections Unit of the University Libraries.

Five collections of letters written in Croatian, Finnish, Italian, Latvian and Ukrainian from among the IHRC's large holdings of immigrant materials were selected for inclusion in an online feature on the IHRC website for the pilot project. Between five and seven letters from each collection were transcribed, translated, and scanned, and photographs from the collections were added to the project.

A multi-media exhibition titled "A Heart Connects Us: Immigrant Letters and the Experience of Migration" will be on display February 2 - April 30, 2011, in the atrium gallery of the Elmer L. Andersen Library. Exhibition coordinator Haven Hawley will feature digitized letters from the IHRC's project and include materials from the University Archives focusing on the role of Theodore Blegen in recognizing immigrant letters as a source for understanding migration experiences. A University of Minnesota faculty member and dean, Blegen is widely recognized as founder of the field of immigration studies in the United States and a major exponent of "grassroots history."

The IHRC's "Digitizing Immigrant Letters" project will be expanded into a multi-institutional digital archive. With collaborating institutions, the IHRC's project will become an international resource connecting University researchers to materials available heretofore only onsite in repositories in Asia, Europe, and elsewhere in North America.

Additional reference: <http://www.ihr.c.umn.edu/research/dil/index.html>

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