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Western Reserve Historical Society Will Work with Wade Family to Create Model for Sharing Family Histories

CLEVELAND, OH – Your family helped support the cultural core of a city. Now, how can their experiences be leveraged to encourage future entrepreneurs and philanthropists?

The Wade Project is a new initiative at the Western Reserve Historical Society designed to tell the story of the Wade family, and to create an online model for studying individual family histories with a focus on institutional collaboration, research, and discovery. The Wade Project will encourage collaboration among scholars and the diverse institutions in the city holding Wade materials, explore best practices in inter-institutional collaboration, and to provide a model to enable access to records of other families who shaped the city’s culture and economy over time by giving plentifully to a wide variety of institutions—not merely a single institution. The uniquely American interpretation of “giving back” to the community determined the role and impact that cultural organizations would have in American cities.

In 1881, Jeptha Homer Wade offered 75 acres of land along Doan Brook to the city of Cleveland for a park. It was one of the first large gifts of open space to the city. Cleveland’s Wade Park and the surrounding area—known today as University Circle—is home to more than a dozen museums and cultural institutions. It is a nationally and internationally respected cultural center. The role of the Wade family in the cultural and corporate growth of Cleveland continues to resonate today.

The driving need of influential families to create cultural legacies characterized a particular aspect of American philanthropy. To a great degree, these nineteenth and twentieth century gifts built the cultural infrastructure of the arts in America. The Wade project will focus on the Wade family’s historic legacy in Cleveland while serving as a resource and hub for collaborative projects with other institutions holding Wade materials.
The project is supported by generous gifts from Mrs. Jeptha Homer Wade III, the George Garretson Wade Charitable Trust, and Theodore Sedgwick, US Ambassador to Slovakia.

The online repository of the project will enable students and scholars to explore the complex—and often conflicting—decisions involved in the creation of America’s urban cultural centers in the late 19th century. The goal of the first phase of the project is to create an online and easily accessible repository of the family papers in the collections of Western Reserve Historical Society.

Goals of later phases of The Wade Project are to encourage collaboration among scholars and the diverse institutions in the city holding Wade materials, to encourage and created discussion of best practices in inter-institutional collaboration, and to provide a model that allows access to records of other families who shaped the city’s culture and economy over time. The initial scholarly collaboration will center on the annotation of an extraordinary set of family travel journals.

Witchey, recently named Director of the project, brings 30+ years of museum curatorial and interpretive technology experience to the position and currently teaches graduate museum studies at both The Johns Hopkins University and Case Western Reserve University. She recently completed the transcription of the Randall Wade’s Travel Journals (1870-71).

Founded in 1867, Western Reserve Historical Society (WRHS) 10825 East Blvd., Cleveland, OH 44106, is Northeast Ohio’s premier storyteller. It presents the lives and activities of 19th-century settlers at historic Hale Farm & Village in Bath Township, Ohio, and preserves and relates the history from the European westward migration into the area known as the Connecticut Western Reserve through the Gilded Age of glitter and industry, and to today’s millionaires and entrepreneurs of Cleveland. WRHS offers a wealth of resources to research your family heritage at the History Center in University Circle, Cleveland. It houses extensive collections in community archives. It is one of the oldest and largest nonprofit regional historical societies in the nation. WRHS inspires people to discover the American experience by exploring the tangible history of Northeast Ohio. For information, visit: http://www.wrhs.org/ or contact Jane Mason, VP Communications & Marketing jmason@WRHS.org, 216-721-5722, x 1501.

WRHS receives public support with local tax dollars from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture. Sponsorships, bequests, grants, admissions, and other funding are used to preserve and enrich the region’s artistic and cultural heritage.