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Brooklyn Historical Society Awarded \$400,000 Grant From The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust

Brooklyn, NY – Brooklyn Historical Society has been awarded a two-year, \$400,000 grant from The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust as part of a pilot program to support New York cultural institutions.

Principals in the New York real estate and hotel industries, Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley founded their trust in 1999 following decades of philanthropic giving to medical research and not-for-profit organizations dealing with education.

The grant to Brooklyn Historical Society was earmarked by the Trust “to support the efforts of fine art and history to remain open, available and accessible to those living or working in New York City’s five boroughs during trying economic times.”

“We are grateful to The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust for its sensitivity to the unique needs of cultural and educational institutions such as Brooklyn Historical Society, and its foresight in assuring New Yorkers continued access to their heritage and history,” said Deborah Schwartz, President, Brooklyn Historical Society.

Brooklyn Historical Society holds the world’s most comprehensive collection of Brooklyn-related materials. In 1993, the U.S. Department of Education designated its library as a “major research library” under the Higher Education Act.

Support from The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust has helped build Brooklyn Historical Society’s capacity by expanding educational programming. In response to the growing demand for Brooklyn Historical Society’s educational services, the staff has been able to lead three times more school tours this year, and is in the process of developing three new curriculum kits that will help students understand the way that local people, places and events connect to history and their own lives. The Brooklyn Historical Society serves 70,000 students and educators each year through professional development workshops, in-school programs, museum tours, after-school activities and curriculum development.

A year ago, Brooklyn Historical Society had furloughed staff and reduced its open hours in order to remain fiscally sound in the face of the economic downturn. The grant from The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust has also helped staff members return to work fulltime. Brooklyn Historical Society staff members continue to work on a number of important exhibitions and initiatives including the project *In Pursuit of Freedom*, which will memorialize the history of abolitionism and the Underground Railroad in Brooklyn. BHS is partnering with the Weeksville

Heritage Center (WHC) and Irondale Ensemble Project to launch the Brooklyn-based public history effort that will include exhibitions, a public memorial in Willoughby Square Park, a permanently marked walking tour system, a nationally-distributed educational curriculum, a theater project and a web site.

As an urban history center, Brooklyn Historical Society plays a central role in recording and reflecting upon the socio-political, historical and cultural fabric of the borough of Brooklyn. Brooklyn Historical Society presents and interprets the borough's culture through exhibitions and year-round public programs.

The mission of the Brooklyn Historical Society is to connect the past to the present and make the vibrant history of Brooklyn tangible, relevant, and meaningful for today's diverse communities, and for generations to come. Founded in 1863, BHS is a nationally recognized urban history center, comprised of a museum; scholarly research library; and educational center dedicated to preserving and encouraging the study of Brooklyn's extraordinary 400-year history.
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