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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

History Center receives grant to preserve Wells' Built Museum collection

Haddock Family Foundation funding will help safeguard irreplaceable African American history

ORLANDO, Fla. – June 29, 2026 – The Historical Society of Central Florida, the nonprofit organization that supports the Orange County Regional History Center, has received a \$55,000 grant from The Edward E. Haddock, Jr. Family Foundation to support a partnership with Orlando's Wells' Built Museum of African American History and Culture focused on preserving and documenting the Wells' Built's historical collections.

The Wells' Built Museum occupies the former Wells' Built Hotel, a landmark in Orlando's Parramore community established in 1929 by Dr. William Monroe Wells, one of the city's first African American physicians. During the era of segregation, the hotel welcomed Black travelers who were excluded from most other lodging options. Its guests included many notable figures such as Ray Charles, Ella Fitzgerald, Count Basie, Cab Calloway, Jackie Robinson, and Thurgood Marshall.

The project will help identify, assess, stabilize, and organize materials in the Wells' Built collection using professional archival standards, laying the groundwork for future digitization and expanded public access. The initiative is designed to ensure that historically significant documents, photographs, artifacts, and records are preserved for future generations.

"There is something sacred about the work of uncovering stories. Sitting with history, listening carefully, and not allowing voices to fade into silence. It's an act of honor, dignity and love for those who came before and those who came after," said Rene Vazquez of The Edward E. Haddock, Jr. Family Foundation. "We are deeply moved to have been invited into that work."

The grant supports the first phase of a long-term collections stewardship effort. Planned activities include conducting a collection-wide inventory, documenting the condition of materials, identifying preservation priorities, rehousing vulnerable items in archival-quality storage, and developing a roadmap for future digitization and access initiatives.

"Our partnership with the Orange County Regional History Center is about more than a continued collaboration; it is about a continued commitment," said Elizabeth Grace of the Wells' Built Museum Board of Directors. "We believe it is our responsibility as stewards to make certain that the precious history we have preserved, and been entrusted with, is not at risk of being lost but instead made more accessible and available."

The collaborative work reflects a shared commitment by all three organizations to preserving Central Florida's diverse historical record and strengthening public access to community history.

“Some of the most important museum work happens behind the scenes,” added Azela Santana, the History Center’s executive director. “By helping the Wells’ Built Museum assess and preserve its collections today, we are creating opportunities for future generations to learn from, engage with, and be inspired by these remarkable stories. These materials document experiences and contributions that are essential to understanding both Orlando’s history and the broader African American experience in Central Florida.”

The Historical Society of Central Florida is a nonprofit organization that operates and supports the Orange County Regional History Center and serves as a gateway for community engagement, education, and inspiration by preserving and sharing Central Florida’s continually unfolding story. The Edward E. Haddock, Jr. Family Foundation is a private family foundation in Orlando committed to advancing restorative relationships between people and the planet through human dignity and environmental stewardship.

The Orange County Regional History Center, housed in a historic courthouse at 65 E. Central Blvd. in downtown Orlando, features four floors of permanent and special exhibitions. The museum is a Smithsonian Institution affiliate and accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. It is funded in part by Orange County Government through the Community & Family Services Department under Orange County Mayor Jerry L. Demings and the Board of County Commissioners. The Historical Society of Central Florida Inc. is supported by United Arts of Central Florida and sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Arts and Culture, and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture. For more information, visit TheHistoryCenter.org.

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