



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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Request for Qualifications for Historical Interpretive Services for the Proposed Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson Exhibit

Introduction

The Johnson County Board of Supervisors seeks a professional historian with experience in research, public history, and historical interpretation to consult on a planned exhibit celebrating the county eponym, Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson.

On June 24, 2021, the Johnson County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution changing the official county eponym to Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson. This decision was in response to the social justice movements of 2020 and identified an eponym that better embodies Johnson County's values, ideals, and morals. The Wisconsin Territorial Legislature in 1837 originally named Johnson County after Richard Mentor Johnson, a lifelong Kentuckian. There is no evidence that Richard Mentor Johnson ever stepped foot in Johnson County, Iowa; he was an enslaver who took credit for killing the legendary Chief Tecumseh, using it for his political gain. The Johnson County Board of Supervisors is committed to rectifying systemic racism and institutional inequity, including removing the names and monuments that memorialize or honor a person who perpetuated violence against black and indigenous people. After considerable research and community engagement, the Board of Supervisors recognized Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson as the official eponym of Johnson County.

Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson was born in 1907 in the city of Gravity, Iowa to parents who had been born into slavery. She enrolled at the University of Iowa, in Johnson County, in 1925. At the time, she was one of only 14 black women students. Despite facing discrimination based on her race and gender, Dr. Johnson completed her bachelor's and master's degrees by 1930. In 1941, she became the first black woman to earn a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa. From 1931 until her retirement in 1971, Dr. Johnson maintained an active career as an academic and college professor, teaching U.S. History at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. An accomplished academic with a determination to succeed in the face of discrimination and adversity, Dr. Johnson embodies the values, ideals, and morals the people of Johnson County strive to preserve and uphold.

Project Statement

The Johnson County Board of Supervisors seeks a historian to consult on a planned exhibit celebrating Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson. Expertise in black history and publicly engaged scholarship is encouraged. This exhibit will be located on Johnson County's administrative campus, which includes the Administration Building at 913 S. Dubuque Street; the Health and Human Services Building at 855 S. Dubuque Street; and the Ambulance Medical Examiner Building at 808 S. Dubuque Street in Iowa City, Iowa. This campus is undergoing a multi-year remodel with OPN Architects that includes plans and design for this interpretive and engaging exhibit. Johnson County seeks a professional historian to research the life of Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson and black history in Johnson County; write and edit content for the exhibit; and

collaborate with County, community partners, and OPN Architects to design and execute a space that is educational, historically accurate, commemorative, respectful, and creative.

Project Timeline:

September 2, 2022 Proposals due to the grants portal at 4 p.m.

October 2022 Contract approved by the Johnson County Board of Supervisors

Monthly check-ins with Johnson County, regular meetings with OPN Architects and other parties as needed

June 30, 2023 Complete research, planning, and collaboration. Produce deliverables outlined below.

Objective of the Agreement/Deliverables

1. **Task:** Identify and document the history of Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson and black history in Johnson County, Iowa with particular focus on the Johnson County administrative campus neighborhood in Iowa City.

Deliverables: Conduct primary research, utilizing oral history and archival research methods as needed, and interpret relevant historiography. Engage the local community in the research process, and encourage active participation in the project. Gather primary source information to produce a report or compendium of historical research materials including relevant archival scans and photographs for public use.

2. **Task:** Collaborate with County staff, the Board of Supervisors, OPN Architects, and community partners on the design and planning of the Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson exhibit.

Deliverables: Attend regular meetings, maintain collaborative contact with relevant staff and contractors, and present a final report to the Board of Supervisors.

3. **Task:** Write and edit content for the exhibit to inform and engage residents of Johnson County.

Deliverables: Produce engaging, interpretive content for the Dr. Lulu Merle Johnson multimedia exhibit. Work closely with OPN Architects to ensure exhibit text is high quality, historically accurate, interactive, and engaging.

Preferred Qualifications

Historian will have:

- An advanced degree in History, African American Studies, or a closely related field or its equivalent in education and experience.
- Training and experience in public humanities, museum studies, oral history, and publicly engaged scholarship.
- Experience conducting historical and archival research and writing historical narratives in an accessible and public-facing way.
- Experience delivering high-quality work within the designated timeline.
- Experience in exhibit development and interpretive planning.
- Excellent presentation and communication skills.
- Experience in public art projects and/or community input processes.
- Residency in Johnson County, Iowa is not a requirement but the contractor must be able to spend considerable time in Johnson County for meetings, planning, and public engagement.

Johnson County will reimburse the following expenses:

- Mileage at the rate of \$0.625/mile;
- Disposable supplies;
- Copies of archival material for the final compendium.

The Proposal must include:

- Application submitted on Johnson County's grants management portal.
- To begin an application, click here:
https://www.grantrequest.com/SID_6256?SA=SNA&FID=35033.
- To resume a saved application, click here: https://www.GrantRequest.com/SID_6256?SA=AM.
- Applications require the following attachments:
 1. Proposed budget with a budget narrative. Must include:
 - Cost of research and travel
 - Cost of labor
 - Cost of any sub-contractors
 2. Proposed Scope of Work
 - Must include timeline of activities with benchmarks
 3. Cover letter
 4. Curriculum Vitae or Résumé
 5. Portfolio of relevant projects and/or Writing Sample
 6. List of references and/or letters of recommendation from at least two organizations or individuals who could speak to your ability to accomplish this project

For questions, contact Allison Wells, Grants Assistant, awells@johnsoncountyiowa.gov 319-688-5808