Title: Promised Land: Original Opera and the Making of Rural Identity
Community Partner: Mountain Lake PBS

A video editing and multimedia project the creation of an opera about abolitionists and land in the Adirondack Park that will appeal to students with an interest in music and storytelling.

Project Description:
A Field School Fellow placed with Mountain Lake PBS will research the impact of the community-based, historical opera, Promised Land: An Adirondack Folk Opera, on the high peaks region and document the process and findings in written and multimedia formats.

In 2013, a community of artists, scholars, community leaders, colleges, and nonprofits in the high peaks region of the Adirondacks gathered to retell a local pre-Civil War, voting rights/abolition story. Abolitionists including John Brown, Gerrit Smith and Frederick Douglass advocated Adirondack land be distributed to free black Americans to fulfill the property requirement to vote. This story focuses on one recipient of that land, Lyman Epps, who brought his wife and children to the Adirondack settlement “Timbuctoo” in 1848. Epps lived through extraordinary social movements including abolition, women’s suffrage, and the “Wilderness Movement.” Recent research into “Timbuctoo” uncovered the contributions of Epps and other settlers to Northern NY State.

Recognizing the Timbuctoo story was too important and dramatic to recount only in words, the community group turned to the artistic power of opera to explore the historical and emotional arc of this largely untold history. The project has since attracted both regional and national artists and funding agencies (including the National Endowment for the Arts) to support this grassroots effort. MLPBS will be making a series of videos documenting the development of the opera.

A Fellow will create a video or videos that document community interviews, as well as the work being done by the people involved in the development of the opera, as well as a research paper that places video interviews within the context of research questions.

In its current form, opera is primarily an urban art form. Furthermore, the inherent costs of opera development and production present significant risk in the creation of new opera. Promised Land has been developed in a rural setting without the benefit of a major opera company. It arose out of a desire to explore a largely untold story that expands regional identity and civic awareness. Therefore, this research will reveal processes, opportunities, and results of rural opera creation. MLPBS has a small, nimble production team working diligently to tell the stories of the Adirondack region and preserve them for future generations. The speed of their production cycle does not allow time to research the impact that local storytelling has on the community. This research will not only provide MLPBS needed information as they select areas of focus as an organization, but will also provide the evidence needed to leverage future funding for this project, and future projects.

About the Community Partner:
Located in Plattsburgh, NY, Mountain Lake PBS is a public media organization serving a vast audience in New York, Vermont, Quebec and Ontario with acclaimed PBS series such as Antiques Roadshow, Nova and Masterpiece, local productions including Mountain Lake Journal, and highly respected local documentaries like the Emmy Award-winning ARTS IN EXILE: Tibetan Treasures in Small Town America and ON HOME GROUND: Life after Service. Mountain Lake PBS provides unique services and
events to families and educators throughout the region, focused on early childhood literacy and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) education, and partners with local organizations to strengthen educational opportunities and access in our region.

**Required Skills:**
A student well-suited for a Summer Field School Fellowship with the Adirondack Council will have strong research skills and knowledge in the areas of American History, Social Science, and/or Media Arts. The Fellow should also have strong media production skills, including videography and non-linear editing experience, to capture community interviews and activities on video/audio and edit them into a multimedia report. Candidates should possess strong writing and verbal communication skills with a variety of demographic groups, as well as strong collaboration skills. While a knowledge of music and music history would be preferable, it is not required.

Through this experience, Fellows will have the opportunity to work collaboratively in a wide range of disciplines, including the arts, history, and media, as well as an opportunity to work closely with an experienced television producer to improve skills in interviewing, videography, editing, and storytelling.

**Logistics:**
This is a full-time paid research position (35 hours per week) to last approximately 10 weeks, conducted under the joint supervision of the Upstate Institute and Mountain Lake PBS at the station’s Plattsburgh office. Composer Glenn McClure will serve as a site supervisor to assist with all elements related to the opera (history, music, interview subjects, etc.), and MLPBS Producer Paul Larson will serve as a supervisor for all elements related to media and production (videography, interview skills, etc.). Field School Fellows receive a research stipend of $4500. The cost of transportation will be covered by the Upstate Institute, but a Fellow will need a U.S. drivers’ license to complete this work. Housing will also be provided and paid for by the Upstate Institute.

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