The topic I have chosen for my final project is a study of the Working Men’s Institute (WMI) museum and library of New Harmony, Indiana, and its founder, William Maclure. Maclure played a major role as philanthropist in the beginning of our country’s history and, though much is written about him, one of his greatest achievements still exists today. The WMI, now a public library, museum and archive, is the only remaining workingmen’s institute still running in the United States. I attempt, in this article to prove an additional to the library’s mission as the living legacy of Maclure’s life and achievements.

Researchers have proved time and time again that we must study our past in order to better our future. One of the greatest responsibilities of library, museums and archives today is the preservation of historical materials. Lamb stated that exploring the bookshelves of someone’s personal library is like “a trip through the mind of someone who is long gone” (Lamb, n.d.). The manuscripts and book collections of Maclure and other founders and citizens of New Harmony provide that opportunity.

The research evidence within this article is strongly supported with several primary source materials from the WMI. The results of this study however, will serve merely as an historical timeline of his life and achievements paralleled with letters from the archives providing concrete, primary source evidence of events and achievements. It is the inference of the researcher that these materials are the best legacy of Maclure’s life, and additional research of other institutions containing his works should be evaluated to solidify this assumption.

WMI houses proud collections of original correspondences of Maclure throughout his career both at New Harmony and afterwards. These correspondences include everything from personal letters to and from friends to official business regarding the running his businesses. It also holds manuscripts from the times of the experimental communal societies that took place in New Harmony in the early 1800s. Many of these manuscripts were evaluated both online through the WMI website’s digitized collection and in person. Research of other historical materials regarding Maclure, including his own publications, were also evaluated.

All images included were taken personally at the WMI with the consent of Director Ryan Rokicki unless otherwise indicated.

This article follows the guidelines for submissions of materials to Library Trends Journal with the exception of photo inclusion and length.

Reference: