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Historic House Museums

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE AASLH HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS AFFINITY GROUP

Issue 3, April 2012

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Historic House Museums: How to Stay Current and Relevant in a Changing World

The AASLH Historic House Museum (HHM) Affinity Group Committee is working to address the multitude of changes occurring in our field. You can read about some of our efforts here: <http://www.aaslh.org/hhouses.htm>.

In my three plus years as chair of the AASLH Historic House committee, I have witnessed our group of bright and dedicated HHM professionals continuously search for ways to help HHMs remain sustainable. It is now apparent that each house is unique and that it will take an individualized approach to find what works.

First and foremost is to find out what your community as you define it *needs* from your HHM. There are a number of ways to approach the question both formally and informally. Here are a few suggestions:

- Keep your ear to the ground. Find out what most concerns your community.
- Be an active community member. Attend meetings, read newsletters, talk with people in the know.
- Get to know your local business and political leaders. Tell them about your HHM and all that you do. Ask them what more you could offer that might address community issues.
- Conduct a community "Needs Assessment." This can be as simple as an informal phone call to several different organizations in your community to a formal survey conducted and analyzed by specialized consultants. Check in with community social service agencies, local government officials, religious entities, schools, parents groups, etc. to ask what they would like to see your HHM do to make the community a better place to live.

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[Connecting to Collections Online Community](#)

Are you a part of the [Connecting to Collections online community](#)? If not, you should join now.

This free online resource managed by Heritage Preservation and funded by IMLS offers great specific information on caring for your collections. AASLH is proud to be a partner in this important project.

- Ask how your particular assets might be better utilized, whether it be meeting space, outdoor areas, a barn, garden space, or indoor room for classes and other activities.
- *Become a resource that is too important for your community to let you fail!*

Then, do your homework. Research, read, and listen to other museum professionals to find out what others are trying. Many ideas can be adapted from other types of museum to HHMs. Your membership in AASLH, AAM (the American Association of Museums), and other professional organizations are invaluable sources of information.

There is an impressive array of blog postings available for free, written by some of the smartest and most creative people in our field. Blogs are web logs or diaries written on a continuing basis. Think of them as virtual communities, especially if there is an active comment section. Try these and search for others by following links or accessing bibliographies.

- <http://futureofmuseums.blogspot.com/> - Elizabeth Merritt, The Future of Museums, AAM
- <http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/> - Nina Simon, Director of The Museum of Art & History in Santa Cruz, CA and author of *The Participatory Museum*
- <http://www.museum-ed.org/> - Connecting the Museum Educator Community
- <http://tenement-museum.blogspot.com/> - for New York's Tenement Museum
- <http://blog.chicagohistory.org/> - Chicago Historical Society
- <http://blog.preservationnation.org/> - National Trust for Historic Preservation
- <http://uncatalogedmuseum.blogspot.com/> - Linda Norris, Museum Consultant
- <http://engagingplaces.net/> - Max Van Balgooy, Museum Consultant
- [Harvard University Extension School](#) list of museum blogs to follow
- AASLH [Small Museum Online Community](#) just launched in April and is a great resource for all historic organizations.

It is a time consuming process to stay current in today's museum literature, but well worth the effort. Think broadly and imagine what your HHM could be. Our future depends on it.

Kendra Dillard, Chair, Historic House Museum Affinity Committee
Director of Exhibits
Capital District State Museums and Historic Parks
California State Parks
Sacramento, CA

Join to Grow

The online community includes free online chats and presentations on a regular basis including many that will appeal to the staff and volunteers at historic house museums.

In addition to participating in the live events, you can view recordings of past discussions. One of particular interest to the historic house museums group is a live [Question and Answer Session from October 2011 on Historic House Housekeeping](#).

The next live chat will be *MayDay! Create a Game Plan* on Wednesday, April 18 at 1:00 pm Eastern.

It will be led by Lori Foley, Vice President for Emergency Programs, Heritage Preservation, Washington, DC. This is a great opportunity for you to think about disaster preparedness and get suggestions from experts as well as your peers.

We encourage you to visit the website, register at the site, and jump into the conversation. We all need help managing our collections and this is a great FREE resource to help. [Click on this link to register with the site](#).

**About the AASLH
Historic House Affinity
Group**

Please feel free to forward this e-mail to colleagues.

There is still much uncertainty in the broader non-profit world. Historic House Museums, like many other museums, we may find ourselves in uncharted territory. What we know for sure is that the traditional methods are not enough and we don't expect a new "one size fits all" business model to emerge.

Now, imagine that we were all alone with no one to turn to. What if we all had to figure it out for ourselves with no help from people with ample experience and creative ideas?

Fortunately, we don't have to go it alone. As the only national organization that provides support and leadership for state and local history, AASLH is there for us in our time of need. With a network of hundreds of history-based groups and individuals both small and large, together *we* will forge a new paradigm that is sustainable.

AASLH has more than 100 years of practice behind it and provides a wide array of services, all designed to meet the needs of *our* community. Check out the entire list at <http://www.aaslh.org/aboutus.htm>.

In order for AASLH to continue to offer this level of assistance, *we* must give back. If you are not an AASLH member, please urge your organization to join as an institutional member today. There are many benefits you will get in return that you can review at the [AASLH website](#).

Backing AASLH means that our needs will continue to be addressed in a timely and relevant manner. You and your organization can contribute to the solutions that we will work out together.

Kendra Dillard, Chair, Historic House Museum Affinity Committee
Director of Exhibits
Capital District State Museums and Historic Parks
California State Parks
Sacramento, CA



[Click here for more Historic House resources.](#)

To sign up to receive future issues of *Historic House Museum Affinity Group News*, join the AASLH Historic House Museum Affinity Group. **The Affinity Group is not a membership organization and there is no fee to join.** However, you will need to create a username and password and share your basic contact information. Go to the [historic house webpage](#) and click on "Join the Historic House Affinity Group" link at the top of the page and then on "Don't have a Login? Click here."

For more information about all of AASLH's programs and services, visit <http://aaslh.org/>





AASLH
American Association
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1717 Church Street, Nashville, TN 37203 - 2991 | 615-320-3203 | Fax: 615-327-9013
E-Mail: membership@aaslh.org | ©2010 AASLH