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Historic House Museums

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE AASLH HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS AFFINITY GROUP

Issue 7, July 2013

Exhibitions in Historic Houses?, Part III

By Jacob Barry
Museum of Science, Boston, MA

The [previous article](#) in this series addressed curatorial and installation issues around interpretive exhibits in historic house museums. This final article examines conservation and security considerations.

Object conservation and security often present some of the most puzzling challenges when creating an exhibit in a historic structure. With minimal staffing, and buildings without sophisticated climate control systems, just about every decision will involve some tradeoff between visitor access and the conservation and security of the objects.



Stringent conservation standards for gallery temperature and humidity often cannot be achieved with an older building with often antiquated heating and cooling systems. However, the goal in this situation should be to keep the temperature and humidity in the gallery as consistent as possible, because it is drastic changes in temperature and humidity that pose the greatest threat to objects.

Providing appropriate gallery security with minimal staffing presents another challenge. Exhibit planners must balance the needs of visitors to move freely through an exhibit at their own pace, while making sure objects are not easily damaged or stolen. Often, the simple presence of a docent or guide in the exhibit space is sufficient to prevent theft or damage. Exhibits can be restricted to objects that are more robust and cannot easily be broken or taken out of the gallery, or reproductions can be judiciously used in place of particularly valuable or fragile objects.

While there are many challenges to using a historic house as an exhibit space, the rewards can be great: attracting new visitors, bring back old ones, and engaging volunteers, board members, and community leaders. Every building and organization is different, so the best way to begin creating small exhibits is to try it, and build expertise through experience.

Free Historic House Call in August

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Historic House Events at the AASLH Annual Meeting

The AASLH Annual Meeting will be September 18-21 in Birmingham, AL. Historic House Museum issues are well-represented with events and sessions during the meeting.

Early Bird Registration ends July 26, so register now to save money!

Here are some highlights for the Historic House Museum Community:

Historic House Museum Breakfast featuring Franklin

Dialoging with Your Community

August 8 , 2013

Presented by Janeen Bryant, Vice-President of Education, Levine Museum of the New South

Moderated by Michelle Zupan, Chair, Historic House Affinity Group

How can we engage our audiences to help shape how we go about the business of museums? How can we use this dialogue to generate more audiences? These questions and more will be the key questions addressed in ***Opening Doors: Community Dialogue around Difficult Topics*** on August 8th.

Janeen Bryant, Vice-President of Education at the Levine Museum of the New South, will present on community dialogue - creating spaces for informed conversations about difficult topics that so many museum are afraid to approach, and thereby transforming the experience of museum visitation and engaging not just the normal museum goer. She will highlight best practices for small organizations with limited budgets.

Historic House Calls are free, but limited to the first 30 registrants. AASLH membership is also required.

[Click here to register.](#)

Is AASLH Online Conference for You?

Can't make it to Birmingham this September? Why not get connected to the 2013 Annual Meeting through the 2013 [AASLH Online Conference](#)?

Is our online conference worth your time and effort? Of course, because its high quality professional development allows you to learn and engage with peers from the comfort of your own desktop.

Since 2009, AASLH has offered a concurrent live online conference featuring six of the sessions chosen by our Program Committee, just like the onsite conference sessions they choose. We also upload audio from our keynote and plenary speakers and other selected sessions throughout the conference.

[This year's sessions](#) cover a variety of issues that historic house museums all over the nation currently face:

- Managing Change: The Keys to Successful Transitions within Historic Organizations
- Recruiting, Orienting, and Engaging Board Members
- Small Museums, Big Impact!
- The Continuum of Excellence and How Your Museum Can Be Part of It
- Volunteers: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Change
- Working with Community to Address Things that Matter Locally

So plug in and [Get Yourself Connected](#) to the 2013 AASLH Online Conference!

Want more information, go here www.aaslh.org/online2013? Or do you want to see a sample session? Email Bethany Hawkins, AASLH Program Manager, and she will set you up with a free sample.

D. Vagone and Deborah E. Ryan of *The Anarchist Guide to Historic House Museums*

Concurrent Sessions

Entering the Mainstream, Interpreting GLBT History: Challenges and Opportunities

Recruiting, Orienting, and Engaging Board Members

Using Visitor Input for a Business Model that Works

Where are the Women at Historic Sites?

Enlivening Historic Sites with the Arts

Financial and Mission Questions Boards Should Ask and Staff Should Answer

Turning Historic House Museums Upside Down: Teens Reinterpret a House

Practical Solutions for Rethinking Our Collections and How We Use Them

Direct Care: Pushing the Exterior Envelope

[Click here to download the Program Guide](#) to read all session descriptions and register for the meeting.

About the AASLH Historic House Affinity Group

Please feel free to forward this e-mail to colleagues. [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/>



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