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American Association for State and Local History

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Big Ideas for Small Museums, Issue No. 1

***Big Ideas for Small Museums* is a quarterly e-mail just for people who work in small museums.** Through this publication, the AASLH Small Museums Committee shares resources that are pre-tested approved by actual small museum professionals. The articles are brief and practical – giving you the shortcuts you need when you don't have enough time, money or people.

Museum Blogging 1.0 – Garland Courts, Director, Las Cruces Railroad Museum

The sharing of ideas is integral to small museums as we search for ways to make our museums a fundamental and vibrant part of our communities. Public museums have been around since the 17th century but museums didn't really begin to interact with each other until the 20th century. But it is the 21st century that has brought an ease to that interaction which makes the sharing of ideas as simple as turning on your computer. One of the easiest and most energetic approaches to the sharing of ideas today is blogging and museum blogging in particular. Museum blogging is really catching on with museum professionals and blogs are used to exchange thoughts and communicate "trial and error" stories that provide examples of ideas that work and caveats for those initiatives that didn't work out so well. Museum blogs are used to discuss current trends, collection issues, governance, international practices and just about anything having to do museums in general.

Blogs can be inspiring in a couple of different in a couple of different ways. First, it is easy to see that other museum folks have similar issues, problems, questions, and concerns, just by reading the various blogs and subsequent comments. Reading these discussions creates a sense of camaraderie that is usually only obtained during museum conferences and professional development seminars. Secondly, museum blogs are inspiring because of the different ideas and fresh programs that are discussed – a great way to see innovative techniques used by other institutions. The inspiration garnered from these blogs is especially important to small museum staff so that we don't feel out of touch, alienated or alone as we work with minimal staff or in many cases, single-handedly.

One of the most popular blogs out there is Museum 2.0, (<http://museumtwo.blogspot.com>) hosted by Nina Simon, a museum consultant who recently published the book, *The Participatory Museum*. Nina Simon's blog receives over 20,000 hits per month and is viewed as a leader in the museum blogging community. Nina explained that her blog started in 2006 with few expectations and was meant to be a forum for the exchange of ideas between "cultural professionals." Nina confided that in her earlier years as a museum professional she was often shy about discussing museum ideas with other museum professionals she would meet at conferences, especially those professionals that were in the higher ranks of the profession. The blog created a way to openly talk about innovative museum practice and engage other professionals to join in on the conversation. The blog is meant to be an ongoing dialogue, "not a lecture, more like collective reflection" where readers interact with Nina in discussing contemporary museum topics. As Nina describes, "Here's this exhibit, problem or new idea I saw, now come along with me on this journey and let's discuss and figure it out." Nina's approach, very participatory in practice and very much in line with the Web 2.0 experience, is a sure bet to continue leading the way in the future of museum blogging.

It's simple to join the blogging community, simply find a blog that interests you and begin reading and pondering on your own. When you have a good idea or question you can share it on the blog in the comments section. It's ok to just read or lurk until you are ready to post, but once you do, you will find the community very open and communicative.

There are many great museum blogs out there. I would advise the reader to ask a colleague for recommendations or just search on their own for these blogs, most are easy to find. One good place to start is a website called Museum Blogs, (<http://museumblogs.org>), which, at last count, listed over 400 different museum blogs. Many of these blogs are linked together, so once you find one you like you

can usually find others that interest you. We are already into the second decade of the 21st century, so if you haven't done so already, don't be afraid to try blogging.

Included here is a short list of museum blogs that I have found both interesting and enlightening. What are some of your favorites?

About Big Ideas for Small Museums

Please feel free to forward this e-mail to colleagues. For more Small Museum Committee resources, including the full Resource List, visit www.aaslh.org/SmallMuseums.htm. To sign up to receive Big Ideas for Small Museums, join the AASLH Small Museums 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 www.aaslh.org/SmallMuseums.htm and click on "Join the Small Museums 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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