uburban life as an American residential utopia began to emerge after the Civil War, as new transportation efficiencies fed the appetite of a growing white middle class for homes near, but not in, the cities. Westchester County, one of the nation’s earliest and most socially prominent suburbs, became a byword for, and progenitor of, communities of soccer moms, commuting dads, SUVs, and other anthropological specimens ascribed to American suburbia. Today, a majority of contemporary Americans of all sorts embrace the suburbs.

The image of suburban homogeneity, however, no longer reflects the reality of Westchester’s population, one million people in 45 distinct towns, villages and cities. Never exclusively white or wealthy to begin with, the county today is 15% Hispanic, 14% African American, and 4% Asian. The county seat, White Plains, is an energetic “edge city,” while villages such as Bedford zealously safeguard their yesteryear charm. Country clubs and four-bedroom homes keep company with office parks, big box stores, condo complexes, Latino bodegas, and a nuclear power plant. Woodlands, horse farms, and trophy mansions jostle for attention with hi-rise housing projects and forlorn factories.

The maturing of Westchester into a network of complex and dynamic hybrid communities formed the departure point of an exceptional recent investigation synchronized among a quartet of county organizations. In spring 2006, the Hudson River Museum, the Katonah Museum of Art, the Jacob Burns Film Center, and the Westchester County Arts Council together presented Celebrate the Suburbs, a series of exhibits and programs examining American suburbia. The Westchester Library system sponsored supporting book discussion events. The project included a “Suburbia passport” promoting events at all the sites. Distributed by the program partners as well as through the county’s Journal News, the passport offered free or discounted admission to all affiliated venues.

Each institution provided a fresh and nuanced approach to the suburban story, but...
for humanities professionals, the biggest news is the power and impact of this multi-disciplinary collaboration. As each organization probed the subject of suburbia through its distinctive prism, the partnership multiplied the project’s impact with cross-referenced content and collective publicity.

The Hudson River Museum in Yonkers originated and guided the overall collaboration, contributing *Westchester: The American Suburb*. Retracing the historical emergence of commuting towns and suburban stereotypes, the exhibit showcased the “Westchester Suburban,” 1932 Ford carry-all station wagon, an artifact fundamental to comprehending suburbanization. The Museum also co-published an illustrated 400-page companion book with Fordham University Press.

The Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville offered *Celluloid Suburbia* featuring films that respond to modern suburban culture. Seven screenings with related discussions rambled from *Cheever Country: A Day of John Cheever Stories on Film* through a documentary about Tupperware to an exposé of oil’s impact on suburban lifestyles.

At the Arts Exchange gallery in White Plains, the Westchester Arts Council presented *A Field Guide to Sprawl*, with aerial photographs from around the nation by photographer Jim Wark. Curated for the Arts Council by the Hudson River Museum, Sprawl came bundled with workshops and roundtables that provoked diverse public discussions about sustainable development.

The Katonah Museum of Art staged *I ♥ the Burbs*, an insightful survey of contemporary interpretations of American suburban life. Most of the featured artists mined personal experiences with suburbia, finding humor, political commentary, social critique, and chances to address environmental concerns.

Visitors and locals expressed appreciation with both feet and words. Hudson River Museum visitation spiked to 23,000, while reporter Kate Stone Lombardi commented in the *County Line* that the shows “commemorated the old and the new, and . . . that which comes full circle.” While project principals attribute their overall success primarily to emerging interest in America’s aging “First Suburbs,” the project’s internal strengths capitalized on this opportunity. With one institution from each quadrant of Westchester, the partnership mirrored the county’s map, bolstering the project’s importance to the entire county. In addition, earlier collaborations among the scholars and program developers had already established a commons of trust, so the initiative gained traction relatively quickly.

Participants had detailed knowledge about who would cover what, relieving pressure to create bloated, encyclopedic offerings. Publication of a multi-authored book and a catalogue allowed curators and scholars to explore the interpretive terrain without covering exhibit walls with complex text. Finally, project developers collaborated on fundraising and media promotion of the complementary projects, creating a very distinctive experience for visitors.
**FEATURED RESOURCE**  
**CITY ACCESS NEW YORK**

**Improving Access Creates Better Exhibits for Everyone**

In 1999-2000, the United Way of New York City documented more than 1,000,000 people with disabilities living in New York. According to the National Organization on Disability’s Harris Community Participation Study, 40% of people with severe disabilities are not involved in their communities “at all,” 38% “never” visit cultural institutions, and 60% of those who do report no sense of outreach or active welcome. Museums looking to serve their communities, and especially those cultivating new audiences, could take these statistics as a call to action.

City Access New York (CANY) brings together diverse cultural and educational resources to promote community inclusion of people of all abilities. Working closely with the Museum Access Consortium, a network of disability advocates, access specialists and museum professionals, CANY offers technical assistance to curators, exhibit designers and museum educators who want to re-conceptualize their galleries and programming to accommodate multiple learning styles. CANY has worked successfully with the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, Brooklyn Museum of Art, Municipal Art Society and The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

CANY’s work, and dedication to collaboration, extends into classrooms as well. In a pilot program called Adapted Arts & Science, CANY has partnered with Education Vision Services to provide a multi-year program for low-income Brooklyn students who are visually impaired or blind. With generous support from the Lavelle Fund for the Blind, Adapted Arts & Science develops an annual program of weekly in-school residencies in the humanities, adapted to the needs of visually impaired students and aligned to academic standards. This year, Adapted Arts & Science is bringing educators from the Museum of the City of New York and the Salvadori Center to lead a study of the Port of New York.

Exploring New York’s history of commercial and cultural exchange, with a focus on the nearby Red Hook waterfront, the classroom project integrates citywide cultural resources with school-based instruction and links classroom study of the built environment to vivid experiential learning. In the museum context, new responsiveness to differences in learning style has both attracted new audiences and enriched the existing visitor experience. CANY, while New York-based, is keen to spread its message and method beyond the boundaries of New York City.

Ken Struve, an experienced museum educator, is founder and director of City Access New York.

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**MARCH HAPPENINGS**

The **New Jersey Council for the Humanities** awarded MARCH a grant to offer a college-level humanities course to Camden-area residents who want to attend college but lack the preparation, confidence and/or resources to do so. The course is part of a program sponsored by **Bard College** in the Hudson Valley. Students receive six credits from Bard upon successful completion of the course. Funded through the **National Endowment for the Humanities’ We the People** initiative, the course draws on Rutgers faculty and other area scholars to create a multi-disciplinary look at “American freedom.” MARCH program director **Shan Holt** will direct the seminar, and classes will meet at Camden’s Cooper University Hospital.

The Urban History Association has named **Howard Gillette’s Camden After the Fall: Decline and Renewal in a Post-Industrial City**, the Best Book of 2005. Published by the University of Pennsylvania Press, Gillette’s study of disinvestment in Camden, New Jersey, was also recognized last month as a 2006 Honor Book by the New Jersey Council for the Humanities.

In October, MARCH sponsored a second conference on post-industrial cities, this one a study of Richmond, California held at the University of California, Berkeley. Featuring the photographs of MARCH regional fellow **Camilo José Vergara** (www.invinciblecities.com), the session brought together scholars, community activists, and Richmond residents to discuss the effects of disinvestment. **Paul Groth**, professor of geography and **Karen Chapple**, assistant professor of city and regional planning, hosted the conference with funding from the Ford Foundation. Along with Vergara, the conference featured Brown University’s **Robert Self**, author of **American Babylon**, a prize-winning study of the East Bay, **Manuel Pastor, Jr.** of the University of California, Santa Cruz, and **Liam Kennedy** of University College, Dublin.

MARCH staff met with directors of other Pennsylvania humanities centers at Penn State in October to discuss prospects for statewide collaboration. **Marica Tacconi**, Executive Director of Penn State’s Institute for the Arts and Humanities and **Pennsylvania Humanities Council (PHC)** director **Joseph Kelly** brought together humanities centers at Haverford and Messiah colleges and Carnegie Mellon, as well as MARCH. The group explored ambitious plans for student internships, collaborative programming, and a shared commitment to support PHC’s long-standing public advocacy on behalf of the humanities.
The Lazaretto on the Delaware River in Pennsylvania was built in 1799 as the first combination immigration, port security, quarantine, and public health facility in the United States. Its story and its architecture, which is unusually intact, offer an unparalleled opportunity to explore immigration history, so central to the experience of the Mid-Atlantic region. Major immigrant groups who came through the Lazaretto include Irish, German, and Scandinavians. The site also housed Africans captured illegally by slavers but freed when their ships were taken by naval vessels enforcing the ban on the slave trade. The site also hosted major 18th-century public health efforts and innovations. A group of historians and interested civic leaders is at work on the preservation and interpretation of the site. For more information, contact any member of the Task Force, via www.ushistory.org.

The American Philosophical Society announced in September the beginning of a four-year process to develop a Philadelphia Area Center for the History of Science (PACHS.) The project, funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation, is expected to include fellowships and programs set up in an environment that supports graduate students in the history of science. With the support and endorsement of distinguished institutions, including the Academy of Natural Sciences and the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, the Hagley Museum in Delaware and Princeton University in New Jersey, the Center intends to create opportunities for collaborations in collection building, resource development, and interpretation that involve multiple regional institutions. For a full list of establishing members and additional information, contact Martin L. Levitt, librarian at the American Philosophical Society, 215-440-3400.

The house where H. L. Mencken (1880-1956) lived and worked in Baltimore, Maryland may at last have the financial resources to reopen to the public. The “Sage of Baltimore,” famous for his editorial wit and literary leadership in the 1920s and 1930s, lived in and loved the small house at 1524 Hollins Street. The House museum has been shuttered since going bankrupt in 1997, and investors have been hard to find, in part because of controversy over Mencken’s racial attitudes. Advocates note his firm support of African Americans as writers and friends; critics are offended by undeniably racist and anti-Semitic remarks he wrote and published. Recently, a very large and unexpected bequest from Max Edwin Hency, a naval officer and longtime member of the Mencken Society, offers real prospect of restoring and re-opening the House. For more information, contact the Friends of the Mencken House.

The Historical Society of Washington has named Bell Clement its new executive director as it continues to recover from the demise two years ago of its City Museum project. A practicing attorney and Ph.D. candidate in American History at George Washington University, Clement joined the society’s board in January 2006 to help with the reorganization effort. Former board chair Kathryn Smith and Carl Cole, vice president of the Anacostia Waterfront Corporation, were elected board co-chairs in April. New support from the District government has enabled the organization to substantially reduce its mortgage on the historic Carnegie Library on Mount Vernon Square. Another city grant is funding a six-month planning effort for HSW’s programming and use of the site.

An exterior replica of the Philadelphia President’s House opened this summer at The American Village in Alabama. Funded by Southern Living magazine, the replica House will be featured in the magazine in 2007 as a designer Showcase House. Southern Living will then turn the House over to American Village for its own interpretation and programs. Based on research into the Philadelphia house done by Edward Lawler, Jr., American Village will use the replica to interpret the American presidency and the intertwined issues of slavery and freedom in the early republic. American Village annually serves tens of thousands of Alabama schoolchildren and tourists.

The City of Wilmington will celebrate its 175th anniversary on March 7, 2007. Activities are planned throughout the year, but the highpoint of the schedule will be that day. Check the city website for updates, especially after January 1.

The Historical Society of Delaware won the state’s only IMLS Museums for America grant in 2006, to launch a 3-year evaluation and review of 24 curriculum-based school programs. HSD programs currently serve about 25,000 students annually. The project will test the programs against state learning standards and revise them as needed. The grant also supports creating traveling versions of four programs so that HSD can serve schoolchildren in southern Delaware who cannot come to Wilmington.

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Maryland Humanities Council recasts its mission around “informed dialogue and civic engagement.”

The Maryland Humanities Council (MdHC) adopted an exciting new mission statement in May 2006, which is the focus of Council’s new strategic plan. By taking on the challenge to “stimulate and promote informed dialogue and civic engagement on issues critical to Marylanders” MdHC embarked on a complex process of discussion, debate, and carefully-phased realignment of its work. With assistance from Campbell & Company planning consultants, the Council sought input into re-shaping its mission from focus groups, market and audience research surveys, and consultations with stakeholders and the public.

As outlined in the Strategic Plan, the Council will use the humanities as tools to stimulate and inform civic discourse in communities throughout Maryland. Key planning goals include: engaging groups and individuals that are representative of all Maryland constituencies; generating a process for working with Marylanders - both individuals and organizations - to identify critical issues and themes; developing partnerships to leverage and maximize the impact of Council programs; and creating and supporting public programs that use humanities disciplines to explore the human experience. Over the next two years, the Council will align its programs and activities with the Strategic Plan.

Over the coming months, MdHC will be considering carefully how to shape its grants program to be the “driver” of its new mission. MdHC intends ultimately that the grants program will fund both proposals addressing critical issues (local, statewide, national) identified by applicants and projects that address issues the Council itself identifies as critical.

To implement the program in 2007, the Council has created a new position, Coordinator of Grants and Community Outreach. A search is open to fill the position and the job description is posted on the Council’s website, www.mdhc.org.

Margaret Burke is executive director of the Maryland Humanities Council.

GOING TO THE WELL  MARGARET BURKE

Maryland Humanities Council recasts its mission around “informed dialogue and civic engagement.”

**REGIONAL ROUNDUP**

Nicholas Westbrook, executive director of the Fort Ticonderoga National Historic Landmark in New York state, received the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museum’s 2006 Katharine Coffey Award for distinguished achievement in the museum field. *Cross Ties* readers will already know from our Summer 2006 feature article of Westbrook’s leadership of the Fort during a time of changes and challenges. The article is available, with all the back issues of *Cross Ties*, on MARCH’s website.

Peter Wisbey, executive director of the William Henry Seward House National Historic Landmark in Auburn, New York, has been named by NY Governor George Pataki to the state Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. The commission, formed by executive order in February 2006, will work with a similar federal commission to commemorate, in 2009, the 200th anniversary of Lincoln’s birth. Wisbey has over fifteen years experience as a museum curator and has been executive director of the Seward House since October 2000. W. H. Seward (1801-1872), was governor of New York, a state and U.S. senator, and Lincoln’s secretary of state.

Mary A. Bomar, former superintendent of Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, and director of the Northeast Regional Office, became the 17th director of the National Park Service on October 17. As superintendent of Independence Park, Bomar was instrumental in moving forward the effort to interpret slavery at the President’s House site. Raised in Leicester, England, Bomar became a U.S. citizen in 1977.

David Taft Terry has been named executive director of the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African History and Culture, after serving for a few months as interim director. He was previously director of collections and exhibitions at the museum, which opened in 2005.

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority has chosen to inscribe two poems at the Dupont Circle Metro station to commemorate the city’s extraordinary caregiving response to the AIDS/HIV epidemic. One poem is drawn from the Wound-Dresser section of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. The other is continued on page 6.
E. Ethelbert Miller’s 2005 work, “We Embrace.” Miller, the long-time director of the Afro-American Studies Resource Center at Howard University, has also contributed a poem to a cast bronze sculpture in the Georgia Avenue-Petworth Metro station. Both projects are expected to be complete by year’s end.

The Gelman Library at George Washington University announced the acquisition of the archival records of Washington’s Riggs Bank from 1800 to the 1940s, which document, among other things, the bank accounts of Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, and Francis Scott Key. The Riggs Bank records will augment the University’s already strong holdings on the history of Washington, DC, and offer new opportunities for inquiry into the city’s commercial history. Researchers interested in more information should contact Matt Lindsay, mlindsay@gwu.edu, (202-994-1423).

The City of Philadelphia’s Department of Records recently unveiled a new web resource providing access to over 50,000 photographs indexed by location. The site, www.phillyhistory.org, can be searched by neighborhood and image type. Detailed maps place each photograph, and reprints can be ordered online. An attractive blog feature offers an illustrated essay each week, complete with links to other sources. Topics range from area institutions such as the Evening Bulletin to places like the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and Chinatown. Tabs link particular images to nearby sites. Future plans call for the addition of historical documents from other repositories.

In Baltimore, the Maryland Historical Society’s fortunes took a serious blow when W. Eric Emerson resigned after less than four months as executive director, citing his family’s reluctance to move to Baltimore from Charleston, South Carolina. Shortly after assuming the directorship, Emerson had learned from auditors of the society’s $1.2 million deficit. Emerson cut a number of key staff positions to cope with the shortfall. Society trustees, who remain optimistic, have re-appointed earlier interim director Rob Rogers to lead the society for now.

January 12, 2007 is the deadline for applying to become a 2007-2008 Scholar in Residence with the Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission. The program supports up to eight weeks of research in manuscript and artifact collections maintained by any PHMC facility. For more information, contact Linda Shopes, Bureau of Archives and History, PHMC, 350 North St, Harrisburg, 17120, at ishopes@state.pa.us or by phone at 717-772-3257. People with disabilities are encouraged to apply, and may contact the Commission at 717-787-3034 for information about accommodations, or via TDD at 1-800-654-5984.

Suburbia continued from page 2

Suburbia, by Bill Owens
www.photoeye.com/booktease/FL028/page0.html


Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000, by Dolores Hayden
www.randomhouse.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780375727214

“Building Suburbia embraces the human desires that underlie two centuries of American suburban landscapes, even as it explains the myriad problems that ensued. It is only with this complex understanding that we, like Hayden herself, can imagine better patterns of suburban development, more equitable, sustainable, congenial, and beautiful.”

—Gwendolyn Wright, author of Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America

Jan Seidler Ramirez, author of Painting the Town: Cityscapes of New York, joined the World Trade Center Memorial Foundation in 2006 as Chief Curator and Director of Collections.
Philadelphia’s Rosenbach Museum and Library is an urban house museum with an international collection of fine art, antiques, rare books and manuscripts accumulated over the professional lifetimes of two brothers, A.S.W. and Philip Rosenbach. Our collections and exhibitions have long celebrated the creativity and prowess of white men (and now and then women) - some dead and some alive. Stories of white heroes have produced meaningful interactions over the years with audiences of all ages and races. But we have chafed against the limits of these conversations and have begun, therefore, to excavate our collections for the stories of marginalized people - often buried in plain sight.

In the last few years, the education and curatorial staffs have discovered objects at our very white museum-some right in front of us all along-that can tell three-dimensional and inspiring tales of the African American struggle for freedom and dignity. Our discoveries have sparked several new programs, including Words and Wisdom, a storytelling program celebrating black literature from Phillis Wheatley to Langston Hughes, and A Student’s Guide to African American History, a neighborhood map of local historical sites created by a group of eager eighth graders.

Our latest exhibit, Look Again: African American History IS American History, took us deeper into the impulse to excavate. The exhibition includes recent discoveries like a racist geography primer for “Dixie Children,” the first book published by an African American, and a 1907 guidebook to New Orleans prostitutes, organized by racial ascription. But then we asked ourselves, what if, instead of looking just for materials directly connected to African American experiences, we turned new eyes on our most thoroughly “white” materials? The results have been remarkable. We now display Thomas Jefferson’s manuscript journals, for instance, open to his inventories of plantation slaves. Look Again arranges the Rosenbach’s nearly unique autograph collection of the men who signed the Declaration of Independence in a way that highlights the two men who, alone among all the Founding Fathers, affirmatively rejected slaveholding.

Throughout the historic house, an interpretive tour draws African American history from the furniture, portraits and high-style artifacts. Slavery in the mahogany industries of Jamaica and Honduras informs understanding of the Rosenbach’s antique furniture. A portrait of wealthy Philadelphia merchant Stephen Girard anchors a discussion of the local slave trade. Porcelain bowls, silver pots, and enameled boxes elicit a discussion of how beautiful objects helped privileged people ignore the slavery that produced their sugar, coffee, and tobacco. Other public programs include a new commission by jazz great Dave Burrell interpreting our collections musically and a series of performance/workshops with storyteller Linda Goss celebrating black family histories and folklore.

Each of these components asks and tries to answer the question of “whose history gets saved and why?” and addresses issues of intention, accident, and (re)interpretation in the Rosenbach’s collections of American historical materials. This six-month project (running through the end of February 2007) is part of a large-scale experiment for the Rosenbach as we challenge ourselves to make lasting changes in our approaches to display, marketing, hospitality, teaching, staffing, board and volunteer recruitment and more. African American scholar Diane T. Turner and an astute advisory committee have helped us make great strides. We believe that there is huge potential for the Rosenbach to become a major local resource for exhibiting and teaching about African American history, but the jury is still out about whether or not this very white museum can make sustaining connections to the black community. That relationship-building process takes great patience, risk, and a high tolerance for discomfort. I hope we make it.

As part of the project we have painted one wall of the museum lobby with blackboard paint, eliciting responses to the Look Again exhibition that can begin a dialogue around issues of race in our museum. Many of the comments so far have been cautiously appreciative and bittersweet for us. Echoing the feelings of many, one visitor wrote that the project has been “painfully illuminating, wonderfully executed, and horribly overdue.” It’s a start.

Bill Adair is the Hirsig Family Director of Education at the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia.
MARCH thanks Stevie and Ted Wolf for their long-standing support and particularly for their generosity in making this newsletter possible.