After working with several new institutions on strategic planning, I recently decided to investigate what factors might predict the success of new museums. I found study subjects by asking the leaders of five museum-related organizations in New York State to identify successful museums. As of 2006, New York State had 1,435 museums registered by the New York State Museum Chartering office. Representatives from the Chartering Office itself, the Museum Association of New York, the Upstate History Alliance, the Lower Hudson Conference of Historical Agencies, and the New York State Council on the Arts’ Museum Program offered independent lists of newer museums they considered successful.

Four institutions, the Wild Center in the Adirondacks, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City, the Slate Valley Museum in Granville, NY, and the Long Island Children’s Museum in Garden City, NY, became the focus of my investigation. I conducted interviews to reconstruct each organization’s start-up phase, reviewed and compared IRS 990 forms, and researched each institution’s programming, marketing, and exhibit history.

One of the more interesting findings is that formal planning played a very minor role. Two of the four museums I studied began with no planning at all, yet succeeded on the strength of well-formed visions that attracted the necessary resources. All four had found and filled unserved cultural niches, recruited well-connected leaders with access to resources, and articulated strong and attractive visions. Taken together, these three attributes were the foundation of their success.

The quality of a museum’s vision is critical. I frequently see museums founded “passively,” as afterthoughts to efforts to save historic structures, exhibit collections, or form a historical society. Organizations founded this way emerge without the kind of creative and compelling vision that develops from attention to audience interest, local need, and available sources of support. Boards of these “afterthought” organizations repeatedly stress that “We need bodies and money.” Though audience interest and resource development may have seemed unimportant in the excitement of creating a museum, that neglect quickly lands new institutions in trouble.

Connecting to community and to resources through board members, donors, and decision makers was also key to the success of the new museums. If museum founders remain satisfied with the initial preservation of a site, their institutions will struggle to engage newcomers and recruit successors. Strong community connections supported all four successful new museums.

The Wild Center in the Adirondacks, which opened in 2006, was the first natural history museum in the Adirondacks and the first U.S. museum to mix interpreted and live collections in a nearly-natural setting. The Center pioneered the hybrid approach, with live animals complementing static and interactive exhibits in a beautifully designed structure fully integrated into its wild surroundings. Before the museum
EXPLORING THE MID@LANTIC

To support further inquiry into the work of starting up a museum, this issue’s Exploring the Mid@lantic links you to several different kinds of resources.

First, the four successful museums mentioned in the article:

- Lower East Side Tenement Museum
  www.tenement.org
- Long Island Children’s Museum
  www.licm.org/
- The Slate Valley Museum
  www.slatevalleymuseum.org/
- The Wild Center: Natural History Museum of the Adirondacks
  www.wildcenter.org/

Second, the organizations that nominated institutions to Lindstrom’s study, as they may be helpful in discussing museum practice with organizations or individuals looking to get started:

- New York State Museum Chartering office
  www.nysm.nysed.gov/services/charter/museum.html
- Museum Association of New York
  www.nanyonline.org/
- Upstate History Alliance
  www.upstatehistory.org/
- Lower Hudson Conference of Historical Agencies
  www.lowerhudsonconference.org/
- New York State Council on the Arts’ Museum Program
  https://www.nysca.org/public/guidelines/museums/index.htm
- Organizations outside of New York State may still find helpful thoughts, and/or referrals to similar colleagues in other states.

Third, national resource centers exist to help museums as well. A sampling of these includes:

- American Association of Museums Resource Center
  www.aam-us.org/museumresources/ic/index.cfm
- The Wallace Foundation Museum Resource Center
  www.wallacefoundation.org/
- KnowledgeCenter/KnowledgeTopics/AreasOfContinuingInterest/Museums/
- Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums
  www.midlanticmuseums.org/
- The webzine, Global Museum
  www.globalmuseum.org/

The Long Island Children’s Museum opened, founding director Betsy Lowe sought resolutions in support of the museum at every public meeting in the region. A board member recruited from the American Museum of Natural History also brought credibility and experience to the project.

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum also blazed a fresh interpretive trail. Co-founder Ruth Abram never lost sight of her idea to tell stories from an immigrant perspective. When she found an available former tenement building, Abram spent five years convincing the landlord to sell and another three convincing others that the museum would be a good idea. Each level of the museum now presents the carefully-researched lives of actual immigrant residents in different historic periods. Building on the work of academic social historians, the Tenement Museum led the museum field by drawing significance from experiences that many people thought were trivial, even shameful. Since its founding in 1989, the LESTM has pushed history museums toward far more creative interpretive approaches.

The Slate Valley Museum developed from connections in the for-profit community to a community, “selling” people on the vision even before a building was built.

These findings suggest that public history should be realistic about start-up and turnaround efforts. Instead of enabling a passive and inwardly-focused approach, new museum organizers should be encouraged to state a compelling vision, engage their communities, and recruit active supporters as their very first tasks. As our culture continues to value ideas over products, only the best ideas, and the institutions that grow from them, will thrive.

Joann Lindstrom is a museum consultant. This essay grows from her 2007 masters thesis in public administration at SUNY-Binghamton.

Joann Lindstrom is a museum consultant. This essay grows from her 2007 masters thesis in public administration at SUNY-Binghamton.
Getting the technology help your organization needs.

NPower, founded in Seattle in 1999, offers technology planning, implementation, and maintenance services to help nonprofits around the country achieve their missions. While the for-profit economy sees information technology as a potent business resource, non-profits frequently fail to see technology as a tool for accomplishing their missions. Rather than investing in top quality technology planning and tools, nonprofit leaders frequently resign themselves to using technology as an afterthought, because “these days you have to have a website.” Trying to meet that obligation as cheaply as possible, nonprofits never tap the actual power of technology, with disappointing results that confirm them in their indifference.

NPower’s slogan is “Your mission, Our technology,” and they are committed to enabling nonprofits to break out of this loop. Subsidized by philanthropic gifts and corporate partnerships, NPower brings corporate-quality technology expertise within the price range of non-profit organizations. Members can contract with NPower for direct services at a very reasonable hourly rate. Non-members can still take part in NPower’s seminar offerings, training classes for professional staff, and email advisories.

NPower PA serves the greater Philadelphia region, including Camden & Wilmington. Their services range across the spectrum from comprehensive, mission-based, system planning to assuring basic reliability and security. Locally, NPower PA has helped plan, design, and set up new technology systems for the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. It also functions as the “IT department” for Philadelphia’s Civil War & Underground Railroad Museum. Nationally, NPower serves more than 4000 clients, with other Mid-Atlantic offices in New York City and Washington, DC. Organizations beyond the reach of a regional office can still access a range of services through the national NPower Network.

The first step is to get in touch through the national NPower Network website, at www.npower.org. See you in cyberspace!

FEATURED RESOURCE NPower – quality technology expertise for non-profits of all sizes

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MARCH HAPPENINGS

“Tracking Down Industrial America,” June 25 session at Rutgers-Camden. MARCH hosted a two-day workshop on industrial history at Rutgers-Camden in June. Funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, these sessions brought approximately 30 scholars, archivists, and public historians together to conceive an agenda for academic research in industrial history. The project grows out of MARCH’s long involvement with the Bethlehem Steel plant. The vast interpretive possibilities of that site – and the importance of industrial history throughout the Mid-Atlantic – generated a demand for scholarship broad and ambitious enough to support the development of comprehensive interpretation. The workshop highlighted tensions and points of collaboration among archives, historic sites, and academic scholars, and pointed toward new ways of linking industrial plants to their communities and of analyzing local experiences within the global context created by industry itself. MARCH will be reporting to Mellon and to other stakeholders in this project in the fall.

MARCH has moved in other ways to link the Bethlehem project to larger community of industrial history scholarship. Director Howard Gillette will be giving a keynote speech at the Pennsylvania Historical Association meetings in Bethlehem, PA this October, discussing the community-based interpretation process that MARCH has been championing, along with the Lehigh Valley Industrial Heritage Coalition. Director of Programs Sharon Ann Holt will speak about the Bethlehem Steel project at an industrial heritage conference at Michigan Technological University in September.

July marked the completion of MARCH’s second Bard College Clemente Course in the Humanities with the graduation of another two dozen students. They will join the 17 students from the first class, many of whom have gone on to further study toward associate’s and bachelor’s degrees. Staff from Bard, the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, and Cooper Hospital, which provides classroom space, all visited the class and offered their support and encouragement. New Jersey Representative Rush Holt also expressed interest in the project, but was unable to schedule a visit to the class. Funding from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities for a third year of Clemente has been requested, and with support from Bard, directors Diane Turner and Sharon Holt are enhancing the curriculum and preparing for the next round.
**PROJECTS TO WATCH**

**Penn State Harrisburg** won approval from the University’s trustees in July to begin offering the Ph.D in American Studies.

**Simon Bronner,** Distinguished Professor of American Studies and Folklore, will direct the program. Bronner adds his own international experience (in the Netherlands and Japan) to PSU-Harrisburg’s already established relationships with significant central Pennsylvania cultural sites, including Gettysburg, Three Mile Island, Hershey, Steelton, Harrisburg, York, the coal region, and areas of Amish settlement. Bronner intends for the Ph.D program to “cover America broadly in its national and international contexts, work with local resources and institutions, and develop a focus on cultural expression and identity, including areas of material and visual culture, folk and popular culture, race, ethnicity and gender, and literature, performance, and media.” Information and applications for Fall 2009 can be found at www.hbg.psu.edu.

**New York University’s Archives and Public History Program** has received a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) for the program’s “Digital History Across the Curriculum” initiative. The $83,000 award will enable the program to develop courses and educational offerings that fully incorporate new media. The NHPRC anticipates that this program will serve as a model for other educators in the archival, documentary editing, and public history communities.

**Historic Fort Ticonderoga** opened its new Mars Education Center on July 6, 2008. More than 500 donors contributed $22 million over six years in support of this effort. (See the feature article in the Summer 2006 issue of Cross Ties for more on the interpretive planning and building of the Center.) **Nicholas Westbrook,** executive director at Ticonderoga, noted that design included heating and cooling systems so ecologically sound that, even with 18th-century-style windows and cedar-shake roofing, the Center’s energy efficiency meets LEED-certification standards (silver level). The New York Times recently reported financial difficulties at Ticonderoga, but the site’s main challenge has been the general reduction of vacation travel in response to gasoline prices. Thanks to the opening of a new bi-lingual exhibit in the Education Center and interest in the 250th anniversary of the French and Indian War, museum attendance is actually up 13% from last year.

The S. Murray Rust, Jr. Digital Scholarship Center at Lehigh University recently launched a geographical information system (GIS) project that maps the townscape of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in the early twentieth century (http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/beyondsteel/gis/). This interactive, historical tool enables site visitors to map and investigate the lives of turn-of-the-century Bethlehem residents and Bethlehem Steel Corporation employees.

**Bethlehem Steel,** active from 1857-2003, is a major player in the story of industrial growth, dominance, and decline both regionally and nationally.

Pennsylvania’s Drake Well Museum hosted the kickoff of Oil 150, the sesquicentennial celebration and consideration of the impact of the discovery of petroleum in 1859 at Drake Well. The current schedule, which is regularly updated online, includes conferences, festivals, and roundtable discussion. Events spread regionally into West Virginia and the Great Lakes. Details of events and plans can be found at www.oil150.com, the official website of the sesquicentennial.

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**REGIONAL ROUNDPUP**

The Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs won the 2008 Bamberger Historic Preservation Award for researching and restoring the 18th century **New Castle Court House.** Archaeology done prior to the restoration uncovered unknown features from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Reopened to the public last September after a $2.5 million restoration effort, the New Castle Court House now includes exhibits about Delaware statehood and about Emeline Hawkins’ successful flight from slavery with her family in 1845, which resulted in the federal prosecution of two Delaware men who aided her.

The **Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority** won the 2008 Arts and Culture Award from the Nonprofit Community Assistance Center in June for the Summer Heritage Passport Program. A four-year old partnership between LHVA and the Lackawanna County Library System, the Passport Program has been extraordinarily successful in helping children develop a sense of place, through community, heritage, and environment, using interactive, fun activities.

The **Jewish Museum of Maryland** won Baltimore Magazine’s “Best of Baltimore 2008” award for Best History Museum. The citation particularly praises JMM’s ability “to relate history to the city at large and the nation as a whole,” making “vital connections without ignoring the

continued on page 6
Philadelphia’s mayor, Michael Nutter, just announced the re-opening of the city’s office of arts and culture, re-styled the Office of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy. Across the river in New Jersey, historic preservation faces great uncertainty following the state legislature’s recent failure to assure continued funding for the New Jersey Historical Trust. The two events make this a good time to consider the question of public funding for the humanities.

While the news from Philadelphia seems better than the news from Trenton, the city’s re-entry into the “arts and culture” arena actually offers precious little for the humanities. The official press release indicates that Gary Steuer, the new “Chief Cultural Officer,” will be responsible for

- Improving access to the arts for both residents and visitors
- Expanding arts education for young people
- Overseeing all the City’s arts programs creative economy sector
- Coordinating with relevant City agencies to unify the City’s arts efforts
- Serving as a liaison between the City’s many cultural institutions

Steuer himself affirmed that, “With the growing recognition of the importance of the arts in workforce development, business attraction and retention, community revitalization, civic engagement, and tourism, it is more important than ever that cities integrate the arts into City programs and policies.” The relentless focus on arts organizations, it seems, leaves the city’s historic sites, archival collections, libraries, and other rich humanities resources well outside the field of vision.

Humanities organizations have the arguments needed to improve their visibility and become attractive municipal investments. The President’s House project, promoted in July’s US Airways magazine, demonstrates that, by preserving archival materials, research libraries can create direct economic value. The gambling casino going up at the Steel site in Bethlehem, PA demonstrates that the uniqueness of historic sites can, for better or for worse, attract major commercial investment.

Beyond such crass calculations, though, humanities organizations remain unrivaled resources for creating and sustaining a sense of place. A strong local identity, as many studies show, proves pivotal to attracting population, delivering a high quality of life, preserving the civic and neighborhood fabric, and cushioning communities from loss during economic hard times.

Given these powerful benefits, communities should be increasing support for the humanities along with the arts, investing in the cultural resources that serve local residents as well as those that attract visitors. Humanities organizations themselves should be insisting on public investment, championing the short- and long-term value of humanities work, and showcasing how humanities work sustains our communities.

Shan Holt is Director of Programs at MARCH.

Congratualtions!

V. Chapman-Smith, Regional Administrator at the Mid-Atlantic branch of the National Archives, received The History Channel’s Outstanding History Educator Award for 2008. The award recognizes exceptional contributions to history education through the National History Day (www.nhdphilly.org) program and includes $5,000 and a special plaque that is presented at the NHD national contest in June. Chapman-Smith, who also serves on MARCH’s advisory council, expressed her gratitude to her co-organizer, Eastern State Penitentiary’s Ang Reidell, and to the students, teachers, and judges who participate in National History Day. At her request, NHD allocated the award funds to cover the costs of sending next year’s Philadelphia winners to the state Finals.

“Greetings from Asbury Park” received the top prize at the 2008 New Jersey International Film Festival this spring. The work of Asbury Park native, Christina Eliopoulos, the film unveils the ill effects of applying eminent domain on a wholesale basis to this historic shore community.

Bill Adair, longtime director of education at The Rosenbach Museum and Library, will be leaving to become director of the Heritage Philadelphia Project at The Pew Charitable Trusts. Adair, who is also a member of MARCH’s advisory council, sees the move as an opportunity to widen the impact of his innovative approach to museum interpretation and audience engagement.
The American Philosophical Society Museum appointed Merrill Mason to the newly created position of Associate Director. She comes to the APS Museum from The Fabric Workshop and Museum, where she served in a variety of senior staff positions since 1994. Mason started her new position on June 16.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services has teamed with NEH and Heritage Preservation to release a free, online video guide demonstrating how to rescue soaked photographs, books, documents, and other valued items. This 10-minute streaming video provides professional advice that benefits families as well as museum and library staff. (www.heritagepreservation.org/PROGRAMES/WaterSegmentFG.HTM) Practical information on safety, simple equipment, and salvage priorities help the viewer get started on the rescue of damaged items. Additional tips for saving family treasures are listed at www.heritagepreservation.org/PROGRAMES/SaveTreasuresRightWay.htm.

Beth Twiss Houting, formerly Director of Museum Communication at Philadelphia’s University of the Arts, joined the Chester County Historical Society this summer as its new Director of Education. UArts appointed Robert Vosburgh as her successor to direct its masters degree program in museum communications. Vosburgh comes from the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, MD. He also worked at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and formerly directed the Elfreth’s Alley Association.

The Rockefeller Archive Center in Sleepy Hollow, N.Y. has reorganized as a private foundation. The Center no longer exists as a division of Rockefeller University, which has officially transferred all its Pocantico Hills property to the new foundation. The Center’s new president is Dr. Jack Meyers, who brings to the position experience as Assistant Provost at Yale University, and as a program officer at the J. Paul Getty Trust and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Thornton Wilder Society invites Cross Ties readers to attend its first international conference on Wilder, called “Wilder in the Twenty-first Century,” on October 2-4, 2008 at The College of New Jersey in Ewing Township, NJ. Sessions include keynote addresses by Christopher Bigsby, Scott Donaldson and Tappan Wilder, a playwrights’ panel with Edward Albee, Lee Blessing, Tina Howe, and Donald Margulies, a reading from Wilder’s works by Albee and Tony Award-winning actress Marian Seldes, and a directors’ panel with Irene Lewis, Emily Mann, and Tazewell Thompson. Information and registration is available at www.tcnj.edu/~wilder/conference/ or contact TWS Executive Director Lincoln Konkle at wilder@tcnj.edu.

Congratulations to Stenton, the Germantown home of the colonial Logan family, for receiving major support for its endowment campaign from the We the People initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The award recognized Stenton as “an extraordinary instance in which a small institution is an industry leader.”

Cory Kegerise has left his position as executive director of Elfreth’s Alley Association in Philadelphia to assume responsibility for administering local preservation programs for the Maryland Historical Trust. Work on a long-range strategic plan for Elfreth’s continues, with outside consultants Alice Dommert, Candace Matelic, Barbara Silverman, and Jason Alexander.

And fourth, there are museum resource groups dedicated to specific kinds of museums. Many more are available by searching online for “Museum Resources.”

Index of Native American Museum Resources on the Web
www.hanksville.org/NAresources/indices/NAresources.html
Jewish Museums and Museum Resources Worldwide
www.nmajh.org/links/links1.htm
Association of Children’s Museums
www.childrensmuseums.org
Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums
www.ahlfam.org/
Small Museums Association
www.smallmuseum.org/
National Park Service: Museum Management Program
www.nps.gov/history/museum/
Emancipating the Scholarly Conference

Ah, the scholarly conference! The spine tingles at the prospect, doesn’t it? Poorly dressed men shuffle through anything-but-dramatic readings of jargon-laden papers. An eager young graduate student tries to take her research seriously, while mumbling in the standard monotone. Much harumphing about why no one outside the room understands “our work.” A few years later, an unreadable volume of “proceedings” takes its place on a dusty library shelf.

As Director of the McNeil Center for Early American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania—a thirty-year old consortium of regional archives, colleges, and universities, including Rutgers—I help scholars organize a lot of conferences. The other members of the Center’s small staff—Associate Director Amy Baxter-Bellamy, Administrative Assistant Alla Vilnyansky, and Registrar Lisa Lauria—work much harder than I do to ensure that conferences happen with as few hitches as possible. Remarkably, our spines actually do tingle at the prospect of organizing the next one, because our recent experiences have tended to smash stereotypes of scholarly fustiness. The wardrobes of the participants may still not pass muster, but collaborations among regional institutions have produced intellectual excitement, supportive camaraderie, opportunities for professional development among young humanities scholars, and other benefits wonderful to behold.

This past April, for example, nearly 200 people assembled in Philadelphia for the only major scholarly commemoration of the bicentennial of the ending of the legal slave trade to the United States in 1808. One of the largest international conferences that the McNeil Center has ever hosted, the “Atlantic Emancipations,” conference was co-sponsored by the Library Company of Philadelphia and the Rochester Institute of Technology, supported by contributions from Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania, and held in meeting spaces provided by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The conference featured twenty-two pre-circulated papers by historians, literary scholars, and archaeologists at every stage in their careers, from graduate students to senior professors. Topics ranged across the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and around the Atlantic basin, from North and South America to Britain, Africa, and the West Indies. Most of those in the audience had done their homework and studied the contributions in advance. Those who had not were aided by brief introductory remarks by the authors and by written abstracts. The focus of each session was an extended commentary from such leading scholars as Mia Bay from Rutgers, Philip Morgan from Hopkins, and Gad Heuman from Warwick, followed by an hour or so of lively open discussion.

On the whole, this conference epitomized many of the things I hope the McNeil Center does best, things that its regional scope and international reputation make possible. A global cast of senior and junior scholars shared cutting-edge work. The format created a genuine dialogue about major common themes, while allowing those in the audience to engage with the material on multiple levels, whether they had read the papers or not. And the conference involved collaborations of many kinds. It was originally conceived by Prof. Richard Newman of the Rochester Institute of Technology, who recruited Christopher Brown of Columbia University and Joanne Melish of the University of Kentucky to the program committee and convinced both the Library Company of Philadelphia and the McNeil Center to join in the effort. Events of this scale—with a budget of approximately $45,000—are far beyond what any of the institutions involved could manage on their own. But with such partnerships, the pooling of more modest investments produced something truly noteworthy.

In the end, one might well ask, does any of this matter beyond the world of professional scholarship? The answer is yes, because “Atlantic Emancipations” brought together an international cast of researchers from various disciplines and specialties who found that they have been working in surprisingly congruent directions. From Africa to Europe, to the Caribbean and across the Americas, scholars documented experiences of self-emancipation, rebellion, accommodation, and creativity that crossed geographical and cultural boundaries. Just as important as such intellectual connections are the personal and professional bonds forged in the sessions themselves, through hallway chats, and over drinks and dinners. Those who met each other for the first time will keep in touch and continue to push each other to do better work; those who knew each other before reinforced their sense of common enterprise. The graduate students in attendance (and they were legion, for graduate students are the main focus of the McNeil Center’s programs) similarly made connections that will have lasting impacts on their careers as scholars and teachers. The two dozen or so public school instructors and members of the general public who attended also made connections of all kinds. They exchanged business cards and e-mail addresses, they asked questions that stumped the scholars (What was the deal on rum-distilling in eighteenth-century Philadelphia?), and they shared the sense that historical issues that really mattered today were being addressed.

Because sites and histories of slavery and emancipation in the United States existed historically in this international context, the kind of scholarship shared at “Atlantic Emancipations” points public and classroom history toward broad new interpretive possibilities. In the articles, books, and conference papers that will emerge over the next few years, scholars will offer public historians a richer vein of understanding to mine than any one site, or even group of sites, could uncover on its own. Best of all, it’s a kind of understanding that illuminates the contemporary public’s own experience of globalization.

Daniel K. Richter is the Richard S. Dunn Director of the McNeil Center for Early American Studies and Edmund J. and Louis W. Kahn Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania.
Nancy Moses goes behind the employees-only doors to uncover stories buried out of sight, and to explore what these unknowns tell us about museum practice today.

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