



Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities Rutgers University-Camden

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Using Diversity to Reframe the Preservation Movement: Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh

Since 2002, the Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh (YPA) has successfully recruited young people to the historic preservation movement. We have developed programs and tours and hosted special events that involve younger people (primarily the Gen X and Gen Y crowd) with their communities, cultivate youth leadership, and encourage young people to forge southwestern Pennsylvania's future through historic preservation.

YPA argues that if older regions like southwestern Pennsylvania are to prosper again, they must build upon their strengths to attract and retain creative and vibrant younger people who can invest in and preserve historic structures. Several studies show that young people desire to live and work in communities with distinctive historic buildings that offer a unique sense of place. Regions that market these assets have an advantage when trying to draw in young people seeking new business and housing options.

The preservation movement has done a good job of emphasizing architectural heritage, historical significance, and even the economic value of preserving old buildings. But, as YPA has shown, the movement must also broaden its appeal to attract a greater diversity of ages, races, and economic strata if it is to remain relevant.

One of YPA's most effective tools is its annual list of the "Top Ten Best Preservation Opportunities in the Pittsburgh Area,"

developed by YPA's Board from publicly-solicited nominations. Since 2003 the Top Ten List has focused attention on key historic buildings in southwestern Pennsylvania, raising their profile as community assets worth keeping. Many preservation organizations have "endangered" lists; YPA believes that young people respond better to "opportunities" because it helps them imagine the potential these historic resources have for breathing new life into old communities, particularly those that are economically distressed. YPA releases its Top Ten List in conjunction with a lively reception that attracts many younger people. The purpose is to break down stereotypes about preservation and mold a perception of preservation as "cool."

Many of the properties listed on the Top Ten List become success stories, in part because YPA has built activities for young people around them. In 2003, YPA led a bus tour of Homestead's East Eighth Avenue National Register Historic District for forty young people that emphasized the developing retail and living alternatives along the historic Main Street corridor. In 2005, YPA led a "hard hat tour" of the Armstrong Cork Factory, a 2003 Top Ten site then under restoration, for a group of young professionals at YPA's first conference. Since then, the Cork Factory has been converted into riverfront loft apartments for a market similar to those who attended the tour.

YPA also hosted a Preservation Month Celebration for nearly two hundred people in

the former Union Baptist Church, on YPA's Top Ten List in 2004. The building has since become the Union Project, a multi-purpose space housing nonprofit offices, meeting space, and a cafe.

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www.march.rutgers.edu

EXPLORING THE MID@LANTIC

Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh's Web site is at

<http://www.youngpreservationists.org/>

Equal parts government program, professional practice, and social movement, historic preservation is the subject of many, often interconnected Web sites, each with numerous resources and links to additional materials. Web sites for the most well recognized national preservation programs and organizations include:

National Register of Historic Places

<http://www.nps.gov/nr/>

Educators will find materials developed by the National Register's Teaching with Historic Places program of particular interest; at <http://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/>.

National Trust for Historic Preservation

<http://www.preservationnation.org/>

The Trust's regional and field offices bring its programs and tools to local communities. Within the Mid-Atlantic, the Southern Field Office serves Maryland and the District of Columbia; at <http://www.preservationnation.org/about-us/regional-offices/southern/southern-field-office/>. The Northeast Regional Office serves New York State; and the Northeast Field Office, Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania; these latter two are at <http://www.preservationnation.org/about-us/regional-offices/northeast/>.

Information about the Trust's Office of Diversity Initiatives is available at <http://www.preservationnation.org/about-us/programs/office-of-diversity.html>; also enter "diversity" as a search term for additional information.

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

<http://www.achp.gov/>

Preservation Action

<http://www.preservationaction.org/>

Each state's government includes a State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), which administers federal and state historic preservation programs and seeks to educate the public about the benefits of preservation. Private advocacy and education groups broaden the work of SHPOs through a variety of programs and projects. Below are the Web sites for each SHPO and statewide preservation partner, by state, within

continued on page 5



Courtesy: Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh

YPA volunteers clean up "Mystery House," in Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood. Now vacant, the 1894 structure was the first home of the National Negro Opera Company; 2008.

For 2009, YPA has adapted its Top Ten List into a video contest open to people aged twenty-five and under. As in the past, YPA's board will identify the Top Ten based on nominations received, but instead of a static, printed report, the Top Ten List will be in the form of short YouTube videos that will be universally accessible via YPA's Web site. In addition, nominators of the top five selected sites will receive a cash award. The first-place YouTube video will be shown at YPA's Preserve Pittsburgh Summit, a youth-engagement workshop to be held in March. More information can be found at <http://www.youngpreservationists.org/preserve-pittsburgh-summit-march-28>.

YPA also engages cycling enthusiasts with its successful "Wheeling through History Bike Tour." By leading guided tours through select neighborhoods, YPA provides participants with an opportunity to learn about Pittsburgh's history, exercise, and socialize all at the same time. The bike tour also highlights some of the buildings that have appeared on Top Ten lists.

YPA's latest youth engagement project is the Youth Main Street Advisors Program. In 2007, YPA piloted the program with a diverse group of thirty-three students from four southwestern Pennsylvania high schools. Each of the four teams of students

produced a video that features the history of their community, highlighting its current conditions and recommending strategies for its revitalization. As a result of the project, the students developed a DVD, received training in the use of video technology and editing software, and learned about local history. They also have injected a fresh new voice into discussions about revitalizing their communities.

YPA is adapting this idea into a book project. In this version, student groups at participating schools will publish a book about their community's past, present, and future. As with the video project, students will deal directly with issues related to history, historic preservation, and community revitalization.

YPA embodies diversity. Not only do its programs reach out to a diverse audience, its board of directors includes a diversity of races, genders, sexual orientations, and backgrounds. Ultimately, YPA understands that young people have the energy to invigorate the preservation movement. But young people's interest must be properly cultivated and they must be mentored if they are to drive the movement's future in a multicultural society.

Dan Holland is Chief Executive Officer of Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh. Jeffrey A. Harris is an Independent Consultant for issues related to preservation and diversity. ❖

FEATURED RESOURCE *Omeka*



For historical organizations with limited technical and financial resources that nonetheless want to make creative use of Web 2.0 technologies, Omeka, a free and open source Web-based publishing platform, can open up numerous possibilities. Developed by the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University in cooperation with the Minnesota Historical Society, Omeka provides cultural institutions with software designed to publish collections and create well designed, standards-based, interoperable online exhibits.

Omeka, which is a Swahili word for “to display or lay out goods or wares,” is designed with non-IT specialists in mind. It provides a simple and flexible design template and supports a variety of rich-format images, allowing users to focus on content and interpretation rather than programming. Also integrated into the

program are multi-lingual capabilities and Web 2.0 functions such as tagging, blogging, and syndicating. It thus aims to foster the kind of interactive participation that is central to public humanities programming.

Omeka is downloadable at <http://omeka.org>. The site includes on-line tutorials for developing an Omeka powered site, working with Omeka within a site, and managing platform elements. The site also hosts forums where users can share ideas and get help from other Omeka users.

Numerous museums and archives have already made use of Omeka. For example:

- *The Bracero History Archive* collects and makes available oral history interviews and artifacts related to the Bracero program, a guest worker initiative that brought Mexican workers to the United States from 1942 to 1964; at <http://braceroarchive.org/>.

- *Catawba River Docs* collects and displays stories and images submitted by the public to represent their relationship with the Catawba River in the Carolinas; it complements a physical show, *River Docs*, developed by the Museum of York County in South Carolina; at <http://www.catawbariverdocs.com/>.

- *A Look Back at Braddock District* is a comprehensive local history site, including oral histories, photographs, documents, maps, and artifacts, that documents the transformation of a rural region of Northern Virginia into a sprawling suburb of Washington, D.C.; at <http://braddockheritage.org/>.

- *The Object of History*, an educational site developed by the National Museum of American History, is designed to help students understand material culture as a form of historical evidence; at <http://objectofhistory.org/>. ❖

MARCH HAPPENINGS

Sharon Ann Holt, who ably served as MARCH's director of public programs from 2003 to 2008, has assumed the position of executive director of the Sandy Spring Museum in Maryland. Formed in 1980 to preserve the history of this once prominent Quaker agricultural settlement, the museum seeks under Holt's leadership to expand its presence through new programming and outreach to its changing community. These goals were boosted in December by a \$9200 grant from the Maryland Humanities Council/PNC Bank Legacy Project to underwrite research for a new exhibit and lecture series focusing on ways the end of slavery changed domestic life in black and white households in the area. **Linda Shopes**, an active public historian and co-editor most recently of *Oral History and Public Memories* (2008), has succeeded Holt as editor of *Cross Ties*. She served as guest editor for the first two issues of 2008. Holt will remain active as a member of the MARCH Advisory Council.

MARCH director **Howard Gillette** gave the opening luncheon address at the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association in Bethlehem in October. His call for deepened collaborative activity in the development of the Bethlehem Steel site anticipated the recommendations of a business plan prepared by economic consultants **Elaine Carmichael** and **Mary Means** and presented to the **Lehigh Valley Industrial Heritage Coalition** in December. The report is posted on the March web site at <http://march.rutgers.edu>.

In November MARCH launched, with a grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, its third Clemente Course in the Humanities in association with Cooper Hospital in Camden. Thirty-five adults of



Tracy Baez addressing fellow graduates at the May 2008 graduation of MARCH's second Clemente Course, as course director Diane Turner looks on.

Starting with this issue, Cross Ties is shifting from quarterly to triennial publication, with issues coming out in spring, summer, and fall. Summer issues will be devoted to more in-depth coverage of current issues in cultural practice in the region.

limited income were admitted to the 28-week course, which awards six hours of college credit from Bard College to those who successfully complete the reading and writing intensive program. A new partner in the effort is Welcome New Jersey/Strive, a workforce preparation organization in Camden. Together with MARCH, this organization is laying the groundwork for a history camp this summer for at-risk Camden youth.

James O'Connell, a recent graduate of Rutgers-Camden's graduate program in history and a former prison warden in upstate New York, has joined MARCH as a research associate, specially tasked to work with smaller museums and cultural organizations to identify resources that can aid their sustainability in difficult times. ❖

PROJECTS TO WATCH

Thanks to the timely intervention of Pennsylvania governor **Edward G. Rendell**, the President's House memorial in Philadelphia has received \$3.5 million from the Delaware River Port Authority, enabling development of the site to move forward. Revenues generated from a recent toll increase no longer can be used for economic development, but the Port Authority's board, which Rendell chairs, authorized payment out of unexpended funds raised before the new fee schedule went into effect. The memorial, commemorating the site where George Washington lived as president during the years Philadelphia served as the U.S. capital, is now expected to open in the fall of 2010. Interpretation will be provided by the American History Workshop, headed by **Richard Rabinowitz**. **Fath Ruffins**, from the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, has joined the interpretive team.



Courtesy African American Museum in Philadelphia

In related news, **The African American Museum in Philadelphia**, as part of its major makeover, will open a new core exhibit on Juneteenth (June 19) 2009,

Audacious Freedom: The History of African Americans in Philadelphia, 1776 – 1876. The highly interactive exhibit has been designed by Eisterhold & Associates Inc. from Kansas City, Missouri, whose portfolio includes work at the National Civil Rights Museum, Harry S. Truman Presidential Museum, and The Rosa Parks Museum.

Spencer Crew, an Eisterhold Associate and Clarence J. Robinson Professor of American, African American, and Public History at George Mason University, is lead historian on the project. Crew formerly served as director of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Recent excavations at the **Jewish Museum of Maryland's Lloyd Street Synagogue** revealed a well that appears to be part of the synagogue's 1845 mikveh (ritual bath)

house. Earlier excavations uncovered a part of the mikveh itself and a brick hearth used to heat the bath water; discovery of the well thus opens up the entire mikveh complex.

More than a dozen historical organizations in the Germantown section of Philadelphia are testing the benefits of collaboration by forming a coalition named **Historic Germantown**. Introducing the tag line "Freedom's Back Yard" to suggest their collective role in this country's freedom struggles, participants have formed a joint board of directors headed by Cliveden Executive Director **David Young**. Cooperation extends from sharing maintenance and lawn care costs to joint programming and promotion through a common brochure to be released this spring. Plans for shared admissions and membership fees are under discussion. For more information, see the organization's Web site at

<http://www.freedomsbackyard.com/>.

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania mayor **John Callahan** has announced receipt of a \$125,000 Preserve America grant to support planning for a visitors center in the Stock House, the oldest extant building on the Bethlehem Steel site. Although still in the possession of the site's principal owner, Sands Casinos, the building is expected to pass to the city, which will be responsible for funding its full restoration. Part of a long term effort to cultivate heritage tourism in the Lehigh Valley, the visitors center will serve as a gateway to region's cultural resources.

The **Johnstown, Pennsylvania Area Heritage Association (JAHA)** is producing a film, *The Mystery of Steel*, to serve as the centerpiece of the newly opened Iron & Steel Gallery at its Heritage Discovery Center. The film, expected to premier later this year, will tell the story of Johnstown's role in the early steel industry;

a recent shoot at the former Cambria Iron Company blacksmith shop recorded a re-enactment of a test of the Kelly converter, a major innovation in nineteenth century steel manufacturing. The theater in which the film will be shown will have heat projectors and vibration transducers under the seats to give viewers the feel of being inside a working steel mill.



Patterson New Jersey's Great Falls, c. 1900

Courtesy Paterson Friends of the Great Falls

Paterson, New Jersey's, Great Falls

came one step further to becoming a national park on January 16th, when the U.S. Senate passed a bill supporting its designation as such. The measure, under discussion for decades, must still be approved by the House of Representatives and President Barack Obama. The 77-foot falls are the second only to Niagara Falls as the largest waterfall by volume east of the Mississippi. Currently located within a 118-acre national historic district, the falls lay at the center of a complex series of engineered raceways and mills that drove Paterson's early industrial development. ❖



Director Bob Rutkowski, with the actor portraying William Kelly standing behind a replica of the Kelly converter, 2008.

Courtesy Johnstown Area Heritage Association; photograph by Shelley Johansson

GOING TO THE WELL *Maureen McGuigan*

Towards an Arts-Centric County: Lackawanna County's Education and Culture Fee

Lackawanna County is a 440-square-mile section of the Appalachian Mountains in the northeast corner of Pennsylvania, the historic center of the nation's anthracite coal mining industry. Like many regions hard hit by deindustrialization, it is seeking to reinvent itself as a vibrant arts- and culture-friendly community. Never an easy task, this demands the combined efforts of the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Thus in 2004 Lackawanna County Commissioners, after speaking with cultural leaders about the health of that sector, decided that arts and culture needed a line item in the budget, on par with other community services. They proceeded to implement an educational and cultural fee, collecting an additional mill (i.e., \$1.00 for every \$1,000 worth of property assessed) from taxpayers, thereby generating \$1.2 million to support arts and culture; and added a Department of Arts and Culture to county government. The tax has since been institutionalized.

Funds collected support three regional anchor sites in the county: the Scranton Cultural Center at the Masonic Temple, a performing arts center; The Everhart Museum, a one-hundred year old arts and sciences museum; and the Lackawanna County Library System, which uses the funds for free programming. Other arts and cultural institutions, including the Lackawanna County Historical Society, The Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic, choral groups, and theatres, also receive yearly allocations. In addition, the fund supports a grant program allowing artists, arts organizations, and municipalities to apply for up to \$3,000 for a project; and free concerts and arts activities during the summer. No other county in Pennsylvania has implemented such a fee, and in 2006 Americans for the Arts and the National Association of Counties chose Lackawanna for the County Leadership in the Arts award.

Local government funding has boosted the artistic health of the county. However, creating lasting partnerships among



David Berent performs in *Operation Opera*, an original commedia del arte piece produced by the Electric Theatre Company in Scranton. The company receives funding from Lackawanna County; 2008.

organizations is also key not only for financial stability but for enhanced public benefit. The Scranton Cultural Center, The Everhart, and the library co-sponsor events, meet regularly, and offer free programs. Partnership grants inspire projects linking agencies and individual artists. In 2008, for example, a local artist worked with a municipality and a railroad agency to paint a mural at a blighted train station. An "Arts Breakfast" series is being planned to foster discussion among business leaders, organizations, and government to promote stronger partnerships.

Seeking to expand its reach further, the Department of Arts and Culture is now developing creative partnerships within county government. It has partnered with Lackawanna County Children and Youth Services (LCCYS) to create ARTS Engage! to fund youth arts programs. The departments share resources with the goal of integrating at-risk youth from LCCYS into arts programs

Collaboration and sharing are not empty words for annual reports. As we are learning, they are the key to ensuring a thriving regional arts and cultural scene. The establishment of an arts and culture tax provides an essential base for counties seeking to create a lively community in the post-industrial era; collaboration moves that agenda forward.

Maureen McGuigan is the Director of Arts and Culture for Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania. ❖

Exploring the Mid@lantic, continued from page 2

the Mid-Atlantic Region; most are quite content-rich, with links to local preservation programs within the state:

Delaware

Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs

www.history.delaware.gov/preservation

Preservation Delaware, Inc.

www.preservationde.org

District of Columbia

Historic Preservation Office

www.planning.dc.gov/planning/site/default.asp

Click on link to historic preservation.

D.C. Preservation League

<http://www.dcpreservation.org/>

Maryland

Maryland Historical Trust

www.marylandhistoricaltrust.net/

Preservation Maryland

www.preservationmaryland.org

New Jersey

New Jersey Historic Preservation Office

www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/

Preservation New Jersey

www.preservationnj.org

New York

New York State Historic Preservation Office

www.nysparks.com/shpo/

Preservation League of New York State

www.preservenys.org

New York Landmarks Conservancy

www.nylandmarks.org

Pennsylvania

Bureau for Historic Preservation

www.phmc.state.pa.us

Click on link to Historic Preservation.

Preservation Pennsylvania

www.preservationpa.org

The preservation and interpretation of sites and locales associated with women's participation in American life is the focus of the National Collaborative for Women's History Sites, at

<http://ncwhs.oah.org> ❖

REGIONAL ROUNDUP

Leadership of two major historical institutions in the Philadelphia region is changing. National Constitution Center CEO **Joseph Torsella** has resigned after returning to the Center on an interim basis in 2006. **Linda B. Johnson**, a member of the center board and formerly CEO of the Free Library of Philadelphia Foundation, will fill the position, at least temporarily. At the American Revolution Center (ARC) at Valley Forge, **Bruce Cole**, former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, has replaced **Thomas M. Daly** as President and CEO. Widely understood as a move to blunt opposition to ARC's plans to build a museum and education center on private land inside Valley Forge National Historical Park, Cole's appointment was nonetheless surprising to colleagues, whom he had assured in the months leading up to the November presidential election that he intended to complete his term at NEH, which extended through 2009. Daly will remain with the center as a consultant.

The University of Baltimore's **Baltimore '68: Riots and Rebirth** initiative, reported in the Spring 2008 issue of *Cross-Ties*, has continued to address issues of race in the Greater Baltimore area. Last fall, the **Y of Central Maryland** partnered with the university to sponsor "Continuing the Conversation," a series of facilitated dialogues that used Baltimore '68 materials to spark discussion about "how race relations have changed in our communities" during the four decades since the riots. More than one hundred people participated in these conversations, held at six Y branches and funded by the Maryland Humanities Council as part of its Dr. Martin Luther King: Remembrance and Reconciliation project. Also, the National Council on Public History has awarded Baltimore '68 its Outstanding Project Award "for excellence in work that contributes to a broader public reflection on and appreciation of the past."

Revolution '67, **Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno** and **Jerome Bongiorno's** film about Newark, New Jersey's 1967 racial disturbances, has been awarded the Organization of American Historians' Eric Barnouw Award and the American Historical Association's John O'Connor Award, both in recognition of the film's thoughtful treatment of a historical subject.



Pennsylvania's twelve state- and nationally-designed heritage areas and corridors recently formed **HeritagePA**, an association intended to serve as a resource network for the state's heritage movement. **Jane Sheffield**, CEO of the Allegheny Ridge Heritage Area, serves as the group's president. For more information, visit www.heritagepa.net.

The **Franklin Institute** in Philadelphia and the **Lower East Side Tenement Museum** in New York City were among the ten museums and libraries awarded the 2008 National Medal for Museums and Library Service, the nation's highest honor, presented by the Institute of Museum and Library Services in coordination with the White House. The medal was presented at a White House ceremony presided over by former First Lady Laura Bush on October 7th, in recognition of the "extraordinary civic, educational, economic, environmental, and social contributions" of these and eight other museums and libraries.

Kim Burdick, chair of the Delaware Humanities Forum and site manager of the Hale-Byrnes House in Newark, has been honored by the French government with a *Palme Academique* (Academic Palm), awarded in recognition of her efforts on behalf of French-American cultural relations and especially for work in developing the



Kim Burdick

Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route (W3R-USA), for which she is national chairman. W3R-USA is a 685-mile stretch of road along the Atlantic coastline marking the route walked by the allied French and American soldiers during the American Revolution in route to Yorktown, Virginia, where their capture of the British army essentially ended the war in the Americans' favor.



The newly expanded Brooklyn Children's Museum

Two landmark children's museums in the Mid-Atlantic have dramatically increased their capacity in recent months. In September 2008, the **Brooklyn Children's Museum**, the first museum created expressly for children, opened its new



Please Touch Museum in Memorial Hall; 2008.

building, an expansion of its current site, thereby doubling its size and becoming the first green museum in New York City. A month later, the 33-year-old **Please Touch Museum** in Philadelphia, the nation's first museum for young children, celebrated its move to Memorial Hall in the city's Fairmount Park. Originally constructed as the art gallery for the nation's Centennial Exhibition in 1876, the newly renovated Memorial Hall offers 38,000 square feet of new hands-on, kid-friendly exhibits. ❖

© Chuck Choi, photographer

Photograph by Michael Branscum for Please Touch Museum

FAMOUS LAST WORDS BARBARA W. SILBERMAN



Rethinking Historic Houses

Saving historic homes is a major American hobby. Television shows and magazines, restoration products and workshops are available to old house lovers. But suppose you don't live in an old house but would like to decorate or entertain in one? Suppose you could avoid difficult "money pit" problems? Need a new roof? Maybe the state could help. Reproduction wallpaper? Call on a foundation. Apply for a tax-exemption, raise more money, and viola! You have a house museum.

When the Mount Vernon Ladies Association saved the home of the Father of Our Country, its efforts became a national model for preserving buildings. But that model has expanded well beyond what those ladies envisioned. Historic house museums now represent almost every facet of American life. At their best, they are inspiring in their missions, creative in their storytelling, and abundant with collections that contribute to interpretation. They are inclusive, welcoming places where many people experience history for the first time.

In theory.

Not all house museums are created equal. Many are a pastiche of "conjectural restoration" or decorated with purchases that "make the house pretty for our guests." Too often all signs of the human condition are hidden. Some historic house museums, like lots of other houses, were home to crooks, adulterers, and murderers. Most were home to people with the same frailties as us. By sanitizing these houses and the lives of their occupants through excessive restoration, static displays, and romantic stories, we have taken the soul out of places where love and hate, good and evil, friendship and frustration lived. Add to this layers of professional standards, donor requirements, and restoration costs that exceed market value and the end result can be an experience that is confusing, detached, lifeless. Yet one of the attractions of historic houses is their immediacy; they enable us to imagine, without curation or interpretation, what it was like to live there. They let us enjoy, literally, the stuff of history.

The professional literature is rife with articles about house museum issues, particularly sustainability. Many proffer solutions; some house museums are trying them. But it's time to reconsider the whole idea of what an historic house museum is, whom it serves, and what activities might take place there.

So, what constitutes a house museum? Authenticity and originality in architecture and collections, compelling and unique stories associated with it, and interpretation that speaks to audiences today. Great leadership, community involvement, on-going preservation, and education are all important components. But house museums need people, people who want to see the house, be in it, and use and support it. House museums like these are easily identified. Cliveden in Philadelphia or the Emlen Physick House in Cape May come to mind.

But most house museums provide more mixed encounters. Some have a degree of authenticity and a modest but compelling story, but may need leadership and a livelier program to appeal to visitors and supporters. Professional organizations like the Tri-State Coalition of Historic Sites and the American Association for State and Local History have identified standards for historic houses as well as the characteristics that make house museums sustainable. These materials provide a road map for improvement.

Other historic house museums are fairly bereft of original fabric, without leadership or adequate stewardship. Collections acquisition is strictly by donation. Repairs occur on an emergency basis; conservation is minimal. Stories that make the people who lived there interesting and complex are traded for their enshrinement.

Maybe these are not museums. Maybe they are not sustainable. Maybe, like other former house museums around the country, they can be used for other purposes. Maybe they can become wellness centers, professional offices, catering facilities, inns, retreats, spas, study centers, or private homes.

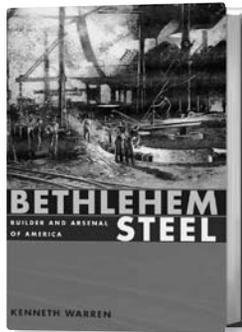
Maybe some of these house museums might be used as experiential centers that allow people to decorate them, renovate them, cook, eat, and sleep in them. People could indulge their old house fantasies without the hassle and expense of owning their own. Maybe they are places where children could learn about the past by sitting on the chairs, playing with the toys, and running up and down the backstairs. They might be rented for the weekend, providing revenue to maintain them at the level of ordinary homeownership. Some artifacts might be removed but some might remain because, as Jim Vaughan suggests in "The Rembrandt Effect," not all artifacts are equal¹. Maybe living in old houses is better than preserving them as specimens.

Or maybe they are just virtual, with easements and a plaque out front. Maybe virtual tours, lots of photographs, and a well-documented history related in story form could allow more house museums to be seen by the public and lived in privately. Rather than overloading the non-profit sector with buildings in need of major repairs and staggering maintenance costs, virtual admission might be a win-win for everyone. Returning historic houses to private ownership would increase the likelihood of adequate stewardship. Private ownership also means the infusion of tax dollars that could be used for other preservation projects.

But what may be needed most is a creative fix. Instead of talking to other professionals, we need to talk with artists, playwrights, vibrant thinkers, and scholars in many fields. We need new ideas, new models, and more ways of making historic house museums places where visitors can enjoy the past. Maybe more "playing" is just what these house museums need.

Barbara W. Silberman, founder and former director of the Heritage Philadelphia Program, is an independent consultant specializing in organizational development, strategic and interpretive planning, and fundraising for historic houses. She can be reached at bwsilberman@yahoo.com. ✕

¹ J. M. Vaughn, "Rethinking the Rembrandt Rule," *Museum News* (March/April 2008): 33ff.



Bethlehem Steel

BUILDER AND
ARSENAL OF AMERICA

by Kenneth Warren

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352 pp.
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—John N. Ingham, author of *Making Iron and Steel*

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