



The Communique

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PLAINFIELD
DRAKE HOUSE MUSEUM

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November/December 2005

A Grant from the Cultural Trust Builds Historical Society's Future

The Historical Society of Plainfield is using an \$8,700 grant from the New Jersey Cultural Trust to form a strategic plan for operational and financial stability.

Consultant Cynthia Conchar is guiding the Board of Trustees through a process that is expected to yield higher visibility in the community while strengthening the Society's power to carry out its mission of managing and developing the city-owned Drake House Museum. The plan will benefit the Society's 300 members as well as schoolchildren and residents of Plainfield and neighboring municipalities who enjoy and learn from its exhibits, tours and outreach.

As the Society prepared to close the museum for needed repairs and restoration, trustees realized the hiatus would be a good time to look at the workings of the Society itself. When a long-range plan prepared in-house proved inadequate in 2000 to sustain an expanded operation, the Society knew there was more to be done. The Historic Preservation Plan was successful in garnering funds for the first phase of a \$1.2 million restoration that will bring more attention to the Drake House, and the strategic plan will complement it with board development, membership growth, better fundraising and programming, marketing and expanded operations.

Conchar cited the Historic Preservation as a key initiative in securing the museum's future appeal and viability. Another avenue for opportunity is the Drake House's proposed participation in the Greenway Project, which will create a border-to-border recreational trail along the Green Brook with a link to the museum.

As these opportunities come together, the strategic plan will put the Board of Trustees in an optimal leadership role and will guarantee a high degree of stability for the Society.

The Society's grant was part of \$600,000 in funding announced in August by the New Jersey Cultural Trust for 11 capital preservation projects and 28 financial stabilization projects.

Preserving Collections at the Drake House

To carry out its educational mission for school children, The Historical Society offers many hands-on learning experiences. Accessibility of some of the collection's artifacts lends fun and interest as well as multi-sensory understanding of these pieces of history.

Many of these items need little curatorial care, but the Drake House Museum is full of objects that do require attention to humidity and temperature changes as well as the threat of damage from water or pests. The building itself is the most important and valuable object on display, and must be guarded from deterioration to prevent warping, buckling of walls, mold infestation and decay.

To mediate between the need to welcome visitors of all ages and preserve the building and its contents, we strive to maintain a temperature as close to 68° as possible, with humidity kept close to 50%. As relative humidity nears 70%, walls may buckle and mold may invade the building.

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Putting Plainfield on the Map

Maps tell us a lot more than simply how to get from one place to another. The recent exhibit at Drake House Museum, "Putting Plainfield on the Map," enlightened 972 visitors of all ages and ethnic backgrounds about the value of maps in showing how a community develops and how the culture of its people changes. It also highlighted the benefit of having this museum as a resource for local schools and organizations.

Twelve school classes, ranging from pre-school through eighth grade, toured the exhibit. Nearly 100 students from Maxson Middle School also conducted historical research using the maps over the summer. Workbooks, more than 200 in English and 60 in Spanish, were distributed to local public, charter, private and parochial schools.

The workbooks were designed to complement the exhibit or to stand alone as an educational tool on map interpretation skills, local history and the history of cartography. The workbook incorporates numerous photographic images of Plainfield through the last century. Teachers using the museum as a resource also received packets on historic education.

On the museum side, the maps themselves are being conserved with the highest standards of environmental controls. One map that is considered the oldest extant of Plainfield has been archivally sealed and framed using glass that protects against ultra-violet rays.

The museum hired local paper conservator Janet Koch to restore five maps, preserving them with technical archival methods.

Storage conditions for the maps and other artifacts has been improved with dehumidifying techniques and proper storage cases.

Museum educators correlated the lessons with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and made sure the lessons met criteria for multi-sensory learning by visual, aural and tactile means.

Funding has been made possible in part by the New Jersey Historic Commission, a Division of Cultural Affairs in the New Jersey Department of State, through a grant administered by the Union County Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs.

Museum staff said the program answered the American Association of Museums call to encourage "exploration, study, observation, critical thinking, contemplation and dialogue" and to "nurture an enlightened, humane citizenry that appreciates the value of knowing about its past, (that) is resourcefully and sensitively engaged in the present."

--Excellence and Equity, pages 7, 9

A Special Note of Thanks to our Dedicated Volunteers

Every donated dollar and every volunteer hour advance our mission to promote interest in history and to develop and maintain the Drake House Museum.

Seventy people have responded to our appeal for funds to support The Historical Society, which operates the Museum. You can join them by renewing your membership now.

As our visitors increase, volunteers become all the more important to welcome them and to help them enjoy their time at the Museum. Behind the scenes, there is a great deal of work for volunteers, who produce educational programming, update databases and have helped us begin to catalog the photograph collection.

Some of our mainstays are **Mary Della Sala** and **Mary Burgwinkle**, who can always be counted on to help out. Others we depend on constantly are **Harry Ailster**, **Alice DiNizo**, **Susan Keller**, **Paul Chapin**, **Katherine Kennedy** and the members of our **Board of Trustees**.

We would also like to thank ...

The following Kean University students who have been interns over the past two years who have given unique contributions of their time and talent:

Steven Bounaspina for the booklet he created to complement the exhibit, *A Day in the Life of a Colonial Soldier*. He has also performed in colonial soldier garb at the last two Four Centuries in a Weekend events and still helps out with group tours.

Jussara Nicholson helped collect a database of local organizations, which was useful in increasing our visitorship. For our young historians, she also created a coloring book and a connect-the-dot leaflet.

Matt Iannuci helped prepare and hang exhibits. He gave tours and assisted at openings and other events. Another task he took on was cataloging the Society's photographs and postcards.

Ronda Esmerelda helped prepare educational packets for use by all fourth and fifth grade teachers. She also led tours through the period rooms and last Fall's exhibit on loan from the Lenape Lifeways Organization.

New volunteers rounded out our roster of helpers to hang artwork, display exhibitions, stuff envelopes and help maintain correspondence with local schools and organizations. **Sonia Fisher**, **Chris Choi**, **Haneef Ross**, **Hindolo Masaquoi**, **David Brinkley** and **Stephen Levin** are always lending a hand. We greatly appreciate their work and dedication to our mission.

Thank you!

Welcome to New Officers

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"We are addressing these concerns, as well as planning to improve the archival storage of maps, photographs and other documents in the collection. All repairs will be done with preservation in mind," said Educational Program Coordinator, Jesse Levine.

Old materials will be re-used wherever possible. Alkyd paint will be used for any painting done over oil-based paints. Latex paint may be used over any non-oil-based paints. Only archival storage materials will be used during the restoration.

"We will keep you informed of our progress," Levine said.

At the annual meeting in June 2005, **Eloise Bryant Tinley** was chosen as president for the 2005-2006 term.

Other officers are **Barbara Zeh**, 1st vice president; **Nancy Piwowar**, 2nd vice president; **Molly Banta**, recording secretary; **Barbara Drake**, recording secretary; **Olive Lynch**, treasurer; and **JoAnn Ball**, assistant treasurer. Others on the Board of Trustees are **John Eklund**, **Olive Lynch**, **Mark Newton**, **Bernice Swain**, **Keith Biddulph**, **Wendy Burney**, **Frederick Cone** and **Sandy Gurshman**.