

History News

The MAGAZINE of the AMERICAN ASSOCIATION for STATE and LOCAL HISTORY

**Disaster prep
and recovery**

**Managing
flooding at
historic sites**



**Maximizing your
museum store**

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Disaster Preparedness in 2026

BY AJA BAIN



Welcome to another issue of *History News*, our membership publication since 1941, filled with inspiring case studies, thought-provoking questions, and expertise from across the field. Our members preserve and interpret local history in fascinating, meaningful, and sometimes unexpected ways, and in this issue, you'll hear about wonderfully diverse projects around the nation. From managing water encroachment in colonial houses in New Hampshire to recovering the sounds and spirit of Louisville's Black gospel community to preparing before disaster strikes in Hawaii, this issue illustrates the best of our field in all its breadth. History people are everywhere, doing incredible things for the communities they serve, often against difficult odds but always with creative solutions and generous spirits.

Both the lead article and the Technical Leaflet in this issue focus on preparing for and recovering from weather impacts and disasters at museums and historic sites. In **"Water Has a Memory,"** Rodney Rowland of the **Strawbery Banke Museum** in Portsmouth writes about the steps they are taking to deal with regular flooding at their site and how sharing their mitigation strategies with the public is increasing their relevance to visitors' own experiences. In **Technical Leaflet #307 "Preparing for Disaster Recovery,"** Kimberly Flook of the Lahaina Restoration Foundation in Hawaii discusses lessons learned about documenting collections and saving vital information in the aftermath of the 2023 Hawaii wildfires that devastated her community.

Beyond the pages of the magazine, disaster recovery has been a frequent topic lately, also coming up at the recent AASLH summit **"Small Museums, Important Collections."** David Janssen, CEO of the Brucemore estate in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, described how the destruction caused by a 2020 derecho wind storm and subsequent restoration work affected how their site thinks about disaster planning, preparedness, maintenance, and the meaning of historic preservation.

Even if your site never has to deal with large-scale fire, flooding, or wind damage, it is absolutely essential to have a plan in place for even minor incidents and to take the small steps now that will ease your recovery in the future. Beyond the traditional disaster prep of keeping collections and archives off the floor and away from water pipes and having fire extinguishers where you can reach them quickly, think about proactively recording and sharing information. If your site was struck by lightning, would you be able to recall the artifacts in each room? Could you prove your equipment and supply losses for insurance? Would firefighters know the locations of your most precious items?

As we all look forward to the new year that will be here before we know it, I hope you'll make two resolutions for your organization in 2026. First, use the instructions included

in this issue's Technical Leaflet to **create a video or photographic record of your site.** Gather your cell phone and staff member or volunteer with the steadiest hand and document your spaces: lobby, galleries, rooms, and staff areas. In the event a disaster strikes, you have to know what you had in order to know what you lost. And in the case of insurance, you have to prove it with evidence as well.

Secondly, **contact your local first responders and invite them to tour your site.** The first time they see your museum should not be the result of a 911 call. Take them through your spaces, show them your collections, and explain what you do for your community. Show them your current fire prevention and security measures and ask them if they notice anything that might make you more vulnerable to fire or vandalism. Explain the vulnerabilities of your collections: which are more susceptible to fire or water damage? How are your most important artifacts protected? If something did happen, what would they need to know to safely and quickly deal with the threat and mitigate the damage? Community outreach is always important, and that includes with your community protectors and helpers. Both sides benefit when they understand each others' jobs and work together for the community good.

Our communities not only trust us to keep their histories; they expect us to keep them safe. Think about the 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis that destroyed approximately 16-18 million Official Military Personnel Files. Here in my home state of Tennessee, there is no 1890 Census data because the records burned in a warehouse fire before microfilm was common. **Disasters create holes in history,** and we already have enough gaps to fill to ensure we're telling the full stories of our communities.

As 2026 approaches, many organizations are thinking about their legacies in their communities and what impacts they want to make in the years to come. I urge you to include disaster and recovery planning in this process. The first disaster may be when the storm hits, but the second and third may be when you realize you never backed up your collection records or digitized those donor files. Resolve to do one small thing today to make sure proactive protection is part of your duty to your community and your site's legacy in 2026 and beyond.

And let us know how it goes. Like a museum, we always want to hear from the people we strive to serve. You can email learn@aaslh.org with anything you want to share with us, and we hope to hear from you soon.

Aja Bain

Aja Bain

Director of Professional Development and Publications, AASLH

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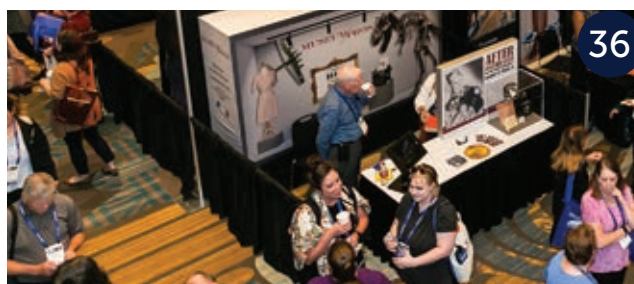
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Winter skating rink at Strawberry Banke Museum.
Photo: courtesy David J. Murray/
ClearEyePhoto.com



The Whole is Greater

BY JESSE KRAMER

But Who is a Museum For?

Think back to the first time you saw yourself reflected in a museum exhibit. Has it ever happened? For me, it was an LGBTQ+-centered exhibit at the History Colorado Center in 2023. It took me 42 years to see an exhibition that represented me and my community in a museum. For far too many people, that wait continues.

Museums are inherently white, colonial spaces. Their foundations were built on colonization and European conquest. The theft of art, objects, and culturally significant items is what established the field in the first place. We have to start there—and work forward—to understand how we got here. Looking to the past to avoid repeating its mistakes is how we advance as a society, and it's also how we must advance as a field.

For too long, museum spaces have been built and funded by a wealthy, almost entirely white donor base. These donors set the narrative. They decide which histories are important and whose stories are worth telling. About a year ago, a guest at our museum asked me why we build monuments and museums to so many white men—some good, many complicated, and some outright harmful—when there are countless other stories to be told.

There is room for all of us. This isn't to say that the histories of presidents, billionaires, colonizers, and other prominent figures aren't part of the American story. They are—but they do not deserve the outsized influence they've held for centuries. These stories dominate our history books and cultural institutions because the people funding and curating them made it so. The victors have always written the narrative.

Today, museums must step up and hold the line. The truth of our collective history is under attack at the federal, state, and local levels. Many institutions are backing down for fear of losing funding. DEAI (Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion) statements are being removed from websites, and commitments to this work are being abandoned. The truth is many of those statements were performative to begin with. If an institution is truly

doing the work of equity and inclusion, that work cannot be dismantled because it is at the core of their work and is part of the soul of the organization.

We need to stop focusing solely on language. Whatever new terms we invent—belonging, inclusion, community-centered—will be maligned a year from now. We must stop talking and start doing. So how do we do it?

We must rapidly and intentionally change our practices, confronting and dismantling the white supremacist structures that define our institutions. We must own our complicity in how we got here and correct it if the field is to survive. Museums are among the most trusted institutions in the country, and we fail the public when we don't actively engage our communities.

With book bans on the rise and legislation attempting to silence and erase the histories of intentionally excluded communities, museums must draw a line in the sand. We must affirm that everyone's history matters. We must acknowledge that history is nuanced and that stories—past and present—are complicated. We must question the motives of those we choose to uplift and offer counter-narratives that have long been missing from our spaces. Above all, we must ask: *Who is missing from our narratives?* Representation matters.

Our communities need to see themselves in the work we do. Don't wait for people to come to you—go out and engage with those whose stories aren't being told. Ask how you can support them as a cultural institution. Cede space to them. Create space for them. Build relationships rooted in trust and empathy. This work must be collaborative, not extractive. Everyone deserves a seat at the



AARON BURDEN/UNSPLASH

table of human history. Everyone deserves to have their story heard.

Many people feel museums are not welcoming spaces. Institutions must look inward. Are your boards representative of your community? Are your leaders? Is your staff? Too often, the answer is no. So how do we fix that? Start by changing your board. Build relationships with the communities you aren't serving and give them real seats at the table.

Work to diversify your staff. I often hear that it's hard to find candidates from diverse backgrounds. It isn't—and if it feels that way, look inward. Is your workplace welcoming? Or is it riddled with micro- and macro-aggressions that stifle diverse thought? Train your staff. Hire people with inclusive mindsets—people who will challenge and transform your culture. Remove those who hold your organization back from fully engaging your community.

Without trust, you cannot serve your audiences—and they deserve to be served equitably. It is our obligation as museum professionals to tell the *full* story of our collective human experience. That includes everyone. Without trust from non-white and non-cisgender or non-heterosexual visitors, our institutions are doomed to fail.



MATTEO VISTOCCO/UNSPASH

We must also support the inclusive-minded people we hire. Establish foundational truths and non-negotiables in your interpretive practices. Hold your board, leadership, staff, and volunteers accountable. Accountability is key. If things slide back to “the way they were,” we fail. We owe our communities more than what we’re giving them now.

This work is not easy. It requires risk. Meet people where they are and bring them forward with you. Sometimes that means walking away from donors or staff who do not align with your values. Cutting loose toxic influences is essential to building community trust and creating a more equitable world. The only way out is through. The work will be hard. You may risk your career—but the work must be done.

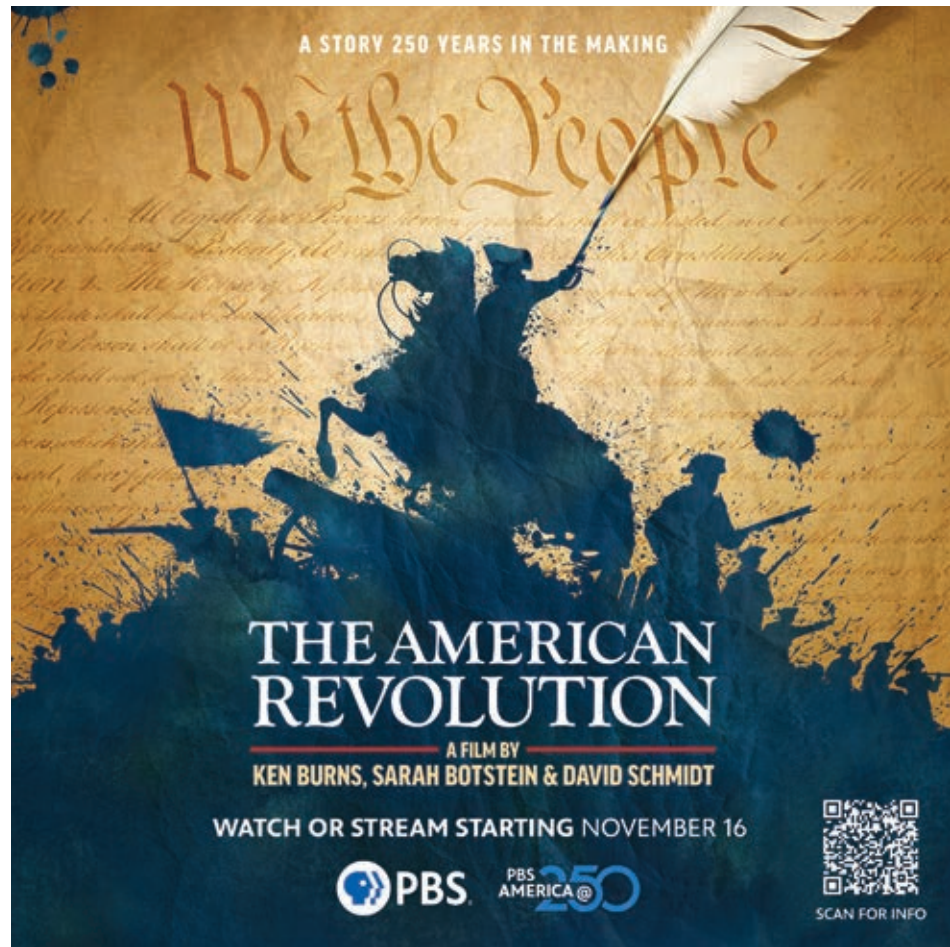
DEAI fatigue is real, and powerful forces want to reverse the progress we’ve made. But feeling tired in this work is a privilege. The people we seek to serve don’t get to opt out of a society that devalues them or denies their stories. The political climate will shift. *We will* rise on the right side of history if we commit to this charge together.

Are you ready to change the field and make things right? It’s long past time to un-curate the last century of museum practice and build a brighter, more inclusive future.



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Aerial view of Strawberry Banke's campus and the Piscataqua River.

Water Has a Memory: Teaching History and Preparing *for the Future*

By Rodney Rowland

Let's be honest with ourselves: historic preservation has gotten harder over the last few decades. So many new and shifting challenges need to be addressed when protecting the history of this nation for generations to come. Changes in building materials, attacks from unknown pests, paint recipes that change monthly and, a growing danger, water. We could debate for some time the reasons why, but that is not the point of this article. Winning the war on these threats to historic preservation is the goal and a major concern at my own site.

Strawbery Banke Museum is an outdoor living history site in Portsmouth, New Hampshire,

consisting of nine acres and thirty-two historic buildings on their original foundations built between the seventeenth and nineteenth century. This campus is blessed with a geographic location in downtown Portsmouth that is both picturesque and a growing destination for tourists. Unfortunately, the campus is also prone to flooding from both surface water and groundwater. Tidal impacts from the nearby Piscataqua River influence groundwater levels (called upwelling) until they impact our building basements. Water-impacted basements, in turn, cause extremely high relative humidity levels for extended periods of time. This leads to more rapid decay of most building materials and damage to vital utilities. In addition, large rain events deposit stormwater on the campus, a low point in the South End neighborhood, which ponds around our buildings and blocks visitor access. The frequency of these events is increasing and recently hit a new high when a storm in January 2024 saw the highest ever recorded tides in the Piscataqua River combined with many inches of rainfall—the perfect storm for multiple building and site-wide impacts.

The center of the Strawbery Banke campus is a large field that was once a tidal inlet called Puddle Dock, a



Puddle Dock before being filled in.

STRAWBERY BANKE MUSEUM

safe harbor that played a significant role in the development of this historic site and the city. The waterway was filled in by the city of Portsmouth in 1902–1903. This one action further complicates our flooding impacts since our “connection” to the river, where all our stormwater ends up, was cut off except for a single 30-inch pipe when Puddle Dock was filled in.

The question now becomes: how do we manage all this water at our site until the one pipe can send it on its way? Like most of the field, our

The center of the Strawbery Banke campus is a large field that was once a tidal inlet called Puddle Dock.

museum staff consists of historians, fundraisers, and educators, not plumbers or water engineers. We have no backgrounds or skill sets that make us competent to answer this crucial question. So we get help, form partnerships, and build a team. Out in our communities are a growing number of experts like landscape architects, civil engineers, hydrologists, and environmental services to help us solve this challenge. Once we have defined the impacts, we can better define the people whose help we need to be successful.

More and more landscape architects are specializing in this kind of work. Strawbery Banke Museum hired one along with an architect to develop a site-wide stormwater plan in June 2023 to identify the causes of surface flooding, the impact areas, and the general “tools” we can use to mitigate these problems. Some of these tools



Strawbery Banke Museum, Stormwater Management Plan, June 2023. The water drops indicate areas of flooding concern.

STRAWBERY BANKE MUSEUM



Proposed solution to disconnect Washington Street, Stormwater Management Plan, June 2023. “Before” photo looking south down Washington Street; “after” rendering showing proposed solutions to prevent off-campus runoff from entering Strawberry Banke Museum campus.

STRAWBERRY BANKE MUSEUM

sound like common sense. Did you ever play at the beach controlling the incoming waves or tide by building moats, canals, and walls? Same idea. With smart design, we can reduce (less water, less impact), capture (dam it up), store (hold it in a specific area), and control (move it along in safe areas) the water away from the areas that will cause damage. One, or likely more than one, of these tools will work to solve flooding impacts. As an example, the flood-prone area in our management plan known as “Area of Concern 2” is caused by city stormwater entering our site from Washington Street combined with runoff from the higher, northern boundary of Strawberry Banke. The solution involved the use of several of these “tools” through the creation of a number of landscape changes. Specifically, two rain gardens or bio-retention ponds, three drainage swales, and one sidewalk “dam.” This coupled with a regrading of the museum’s roads in this area will completely redefine how the flood waters flow through this area, keeping it away from the historic houses and into the created management areas.

In all, the museum’s campus has nine areas that will need this type of stormwater treatment. We are working on all of them to some degree, but in different phases from planning to design to implementation. As we look deeper into each impacted area, we keep in mind our main mission to teach the history of our museum’s neighborhood. We are storing stormwater and teaching history at the same time. As the museum and the design team plan future work, we look to create a bio-retention pond that evokes the look of the old tidal inlet with wharves and native plants. We then strategically place site signage with historic images of the old inlet before it was filled in. Planning also involves the re-toration of an important archaeological site which today is nothing more than sections of an old foundation

As we look deeper into each impacted area, we keep in mind our main mission to teach the history of our museum’s neighborhood. We are storing stormwater and teaching history at the same time.

in the grass. We’ll then use this foundation for storing stormwater and to tell the story of the Marshall Pottery site, which produced vital redware vessels for the local community and had three enslaved individuals laboring there. We are storing stormwater and teaching history at the same time.

Unfortunately, surface water treatments or mitigation strategies only get Strawberry Banke part of the way to resiliency. You may recall the site is also plagued by groundwater impacts or groundwater intrusion. This has to be handled in a slightly different way and with a slightly different team of partners. One partner in finding groundwater solutions is the University of New Hampshire Geospatial Science Center. They installed and maintain for Strawberry Banke a groundwater sensor network studying how groundwater is moving on our site. This information is vital to finding the right strategy to protect our historic resources.

An important structure benefiting from this strategy is the Penhallow-Cousins House. The 1750 building was moved to the site in 1862 when it was an active, growing residential neighborhood, long before the museum was created. The chosen site was reclaimed land, part of the Puddle Dock tidal inlet, that was the out-flow to another body of water known as the South Mill Pond. In fact, archaeological investigation of this area prior to the foundation work on the house uncovered a cobble spillway feature, indicating attempts at early water management from the late eighteenth century. In 1862, the house was placed on a loose stone foundation with a dirt floor. As groundwater levels increased over the decades, the basement was plagued by high humidity levels and later impacted by standing water as well. The result was rapid decay of both brick and wood structural elements of the house. Looking at our treatment options, we chose a new wet-proof foundation that allows groundwater to drain



The 1750 building was moved to the site in 1862 when it was an active, growing residential neighborhood.

The buildings on the museum campus span a wide range of time periods and styles.

in and out freely. The entire foundation, inside and out, has perforated pipes connected to the city storm water system to manage this groundwater. Flood vents on the rear elevation of the new foundation and a sump pump add protection from water impacting the undercarriage of the house.

The decision to remove this historic foundation was not an easy one, but we must find the balance between historic preservation and resiliency. Each location and example of water impact must be studied and understood to determine the best course of action. Fortunately all the treatments available to us are now part of the National Park Service Guidelines on Flood Adaptation (available online). The guidelines are flexible by design since each case will bring unique qualities needing unique solutions. Each successful adaptation will land somewhere on the line between historic preservation and resiliency. It is finding the balance that takes time and plenty of support.

The moral of this story is solutions are there to battle these new and growing threats, but success is dependent on seeking the partnerships one needs to formulate a plan. In this example, it really does take a village. Strawberry Banke is blessed with help from paid consultants, volunteers, state and city employees, and the greater community as a whole. We also seek advice from a regional group called the New Hampshire Coastal Adaptation Workgroup. This is a volunteer-run organization whose mission includes



Penhallow-Cousins House c. 1750 on new wet-proof foundation with flood vents.

helping with the regional response to flooding. Its members represent numerous disciplines offering an incredible opportunity for those needing guidance. More and more of these types of regional groups are popping up, so find out if your community has one. A favorite partnership came from the local Piscataqua Garden Club. They awarded us a grant for the native plants that would go in our new rain gardens and then came on-site to plant them. It takes a village!

Lastly, it is important to talk about the role of museums and other publicly accessed institutions as we navigate these difficult waters (pardon the pun). We all have a unique opportunity to educate and engage the visitors



Penhallow-Cousins House on cribbing to replace its foundation.

to our sites. We are, in part, a stage set where we can tell many stories, offer many experiences, and create memories with them. While many of us have done this for years when it comes to history or science, it is important we consider doing this for the causes that effect all of us. Flooding is not unique to Strawberry Banke Museum. In fact, the oldest settlements around the world tend to be located on bodies of water due to the need for sources of food and modes of transportation. Many of these sites are at risk today for flooding. So do we not have an obligation to teach or inform about these impacts and the possible solutions? Should we not teach what we learn as we deal with these issues in hopes of helping others and their communities?

Strawbery Banke embraced this role in the creation of a temporary exhibit called *Water Has a Memory: Preserving Strawberry Banke and the City of Portsmouth from*

**The local
Piscataqua
Garden
Club
awarded us
a grant for
the native
plants that
would go
in our new
rain
gardens.**

Sea Level Rise. A partnership with the City of Portsmouth Department of Public Works (DPW), this exhibit helped both organizations communicate with the community about their important projects related to stormwater. The DPW, for example, has an ongoing project called “Think Blue! What Can You Do?” to protect and mitigate stormwater. These partnerships are critical to success and so beneficial to the larger community. Also in this exhibit was a touchscreen interactive that explores the changing landscape of the Puddle Dock tidal inlet. While demonstrating this change over time, we also included what change might occur if we are successful, or not, in becoming resilient. This interactive touchscreen was so popular it is now part of the visitor introductory experience in the museum’s visitor center. The exhibit was up for four years before being retired, but was so critical to mission and messaging that we hope to have a permanent



Members of the Piscataqua Garden Club volunteering to plant native plant species in completed rain garden.

installation in 2027. This certainly speaks to the importance of public outreach and community partnerships.

While we think about public outreach, we can explore the role of history in our current situation and the role the very objects and buildings we are tasked with preserving might have played in the development of threats we are seeing today. Many years ago, I was the object conservator for the Abbott Grocery Store Project at Strawberry Banke. We were restoring a circa-1720 house as a well-loved community mom and pop grocery store from 1943. This store was in existence from 1919 to 1952, but we targeted the World War II era to talk about life on the American homefront. I was responsible for preparing the 2,500 objects that would go on the store shelves, everything from packs of cigarettes to cans of Spam.

One such object was a coal bag from the Charles E. Walker Coal Company (1882-1951). Walker Coal was

**We can tell
national
and even
global
stories
from even
humble
artifacts.**

a large coal plant right on the banks of the Piscataqua River, within sight of where Strawberry Banke is located today. This object was an exciting and important gift to the museum as we developed the story of the Abbott store, a piece of Portsmouth's history that played a big role during World War II (coal was the main source of heat and fuel on the homefront during the war as other fuels were sent overseas). But of late, we also begin to look at objects and their longer-term impacts. Did the mining and burning of millions of tons of coal have a longer, sustaining impact on our country's history? On our country's future? These are hard, thought-provoking questions. In the book *White Pine* by Andrew Vietze, we learn the amazing history of this country through the "eyes" of the White Pine tree. Think of the number of objects in our collections made of this valuable resource, nevermind the number of historic houses built of white

pine. Vietze clearly shows us the importance of this resource to the history and development of our nation. We can tell national and even global stories from even humble artifacts, including how historic industries and practices impacted the threats we deal with today at our sites.

It is stated at many public history and museum conferences that organizations that depend on visitation as an income source need to ensure they are relevant to today's society and that they make connections with visitors in relevant matters that are important to them.

Disasters and threat mitigation are increasingly relevant to so many of our visitors' current and future lives. Our daily lives are bombarded by stories of natural disasters of historic proportions; events that impact lives and that require a nation-wide recovery response that consumes increasingly considerable resources, including financial. Interpreting our own environmental challenges and solutions and the historic context in which they developed is a valuable point of connection and relevancy with visitors today; a connection that I would argue will matter to more and more people as time goes by.



Rodney Rowland is the Director of Environmental Sustainability at Strawberry Banke Museum in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. His 35-year career at the museum has always focused on preservation, but the current task of flood resiliency is the largest undertaking in the museum's 73-year history. To learn more, please visit strawberrybanke.org/sea-level-rise. Contact Rodney at rrowland@sbmuseum.org.



STRAWBERRY BANKE MUSEUM



The Abbott Grocery Store, a circa-1720 house that served as a store during World War II.



Walker Coal Bag, circa 1930-1950.

Working with Volunteers at Cemeteries



Historic cemeteries are valuable but often overlooked historic resources in our communities.

While some areas have large well-known cemeteries with dedicated staff and regular events like Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta or Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, there are thousands more small burial grounds tied to families, religious bodies, and local organizations with important stories to tell. With enough research, regular maintenance, and interesting

programs, cemeteries can become wonderful outdoor museums that humanize the past for contemporary communities.

Preservation projects or programming at sites like these, even if led by history professionals or larger organizations, often rely on the essential work of volunteers. Volunteers possess unique skill sets, generous spirits, and a passion for history, but might not have experience in the work of public history or nonprofits. Their diverse interests and expertise

By Jason Harpe

cemeteries need to strategize to effectively plan and direct the work of volunteers. Participants need some degree of training and management to succeed in this work, and we owe it to them to ensure their work is safe, meaningful, and contributing to the overall goals of cemetery preservation.

Recruiting Volunteers

The first hurdle we often face is recruiting volunteers, which is true for many other types of historic sites as well. Where do we look to find the right people for the project, and enough people to do it well? With websites and email and social media, it's never been easier to find people interested in what you're doing who want to help. Whether you start with a website or social media account or posting flyers in the public library, the first step is letting people know your project exists and that it needs their help. Once you get a few volunteers, it tends to snowball as they tell their family and neighbors and become recruiters themselves.

It also helps to be active in your local community, going to community meetings, belonging to other organizations, and just talking about the project in your social and professional networks. You never know whose child is looking for a scout project, or who's retiring soon and is looking for new hobbies and ways to give back.

Getting to know other volunteer or interest groups in your community can be fruitful as well. People have diverse interests, and there are certainly plenty of related interests out there from which to draw volunteers for a history project. Genealogists, gardeners, artists, reenactors, and others are often also interested in historic cemeteries and could make great volunteers. Local scouting groups, veterans' organizations, high school and college honor societies and service clubs, Elk and Moose lodges, and church groups can all be great sources of volunteers.

Greenwood Cemetery in Jackson, Mississippi, has a very active gardening program at the cemetery. They partnered

This article is adapted from an October 2025 webinar. The full recording is available at learn.aaslh.org.

bring incredible advantages to this work: they know their community and are involved in other organizations, can spread the word, bring skills from outside the museum world, may have ties to new funding sources, and foster long-term stewardship as advocates and partners.

Cemetery projects can vary widely, including documentation, landscaping, stone cleaning and maintenance, research, new technology, and programming, and groups working at

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Volunteer

We rely on our team of more than 200 volunteers every day to fulfill our mission to preserve, restore, enhance, and share Oakland Cemetery and its rich history.

Volunteers lead tours, staff the Visitor Center, and work in the gardens. Volunteers also lend a hand at the special events hosted throughout the year as important fundraisers.

Application Form

Posting on your website or social media page is a key first step for getting volunteers.



Volunteers cleaning gravemarkers at Greenwood Cemetery.

with local Master Gardeners to clean up overgrown areas. There are Master Gardeners all over the country who are used to working outside and have tremendous knowledge to share about your cemetery's flora, helping distinguish weeds and invasive species from intentional plantings as well as caring for new plantings. Even if they're not all history buffs, gardeners are great people to have on your volunteer team.

The Right Jobs for the Right People

Once you have some volunteers signed up, the next step is assigning them jobs in the project. There is plenty of work to do in preserving and interpreting cemeteries, so there's a job for almost any skill set or aptitude that volunteers might have. Something that's important to do before you get started is clearly communicate the needs of the project to volunteers, and then ask volunteers about their interests and skills. One key to retaining volunteers and completing successful projects is matching their wants with the project's needs. If people are enjoying themselves while contributing to a project they believe in, they'll do better and stick with you longer.

Some people love doing genealogy research, some love giving presentations, some love planning events, and some love landscaping and gardening. Some might not know what they love, but generally people know what they're good at. Below are just a few examples of tasks volunteers can assist with.

Documentation: This can include mapping, photography, and transcribing inscriptions on markers. Mapping doesn't have to involve much technology, and even cell phone photos can capture a lot of detail. This task is important for knowing the boundaries and make-up of your cemetery, capturing the condition of markers, and making note of the text on markers before they deteriorate. Documentation can allow you to develop maps and brochures for the public and to update Ancestry, FindAGrave, and other sites so researchers and families can be aware of who's in your cemetery. Documentation is also the first step in many projects, since you need to know which areas of the cemetery need attention to prioritize them and what the area's full footprint is to allocate resources effectively.

Research: A step beyond documentation, this can involve learning more about the people buried in your cemetery and their families and times; creating tours or programs around this information; investigating how and when your cemetery was founded; looking for mentions of your cemetery in old newspapers; and other topics. This can involve teaming up with your local library or historical society, and should strive to preserve the research findings for the future.

Outreach: From running a social media page to delivering talks on cemetery history to local clubs and schools, volunteers are great at spreading the word. If you develop walking tours, they can be wonderful guides who share their enthusiasm for the site with visitors.

Gravemarker cleaning: Volunteers can do basic gravemarker cleaning with some training and warnings about potential pitfalls. The number one rule is do no harm. You don't want to do anything that's not reversible. Select the gentlest cleaning method possible: sometimes just water and a soft bristle brush is enough to do the job. And be clear what the job is: you can't make things look brand new, but you can deal with staining or biological growth or other things that may deteriorate the stone over time and obscure the text on it. Explain to volunteers what "clean" may look like in this context and that it takes time so they don't scrub too enthusiastically or overuse products.

When you're working on different types of stone, do a sample on one very small patch just to make sure you are not causing problems for that stone with your cleaning. Always follow the manufacturer's recommendations when using D/2 Biological Solution or other specialized gravemarker cleaning products. No matter what you do, do not remove any original surfaces. If you are working on a piece of marble, there's a process called sugaring. If you notice that some of the small particles of the stone are coming off, you need to stop immediately. Stay away from bleach or other salt-laden cleaners; no Clorox or things of that nature. There's no need to have a pressure washer or any kind of sandblasting or harsh chemicals. Look for specific cleaning guidance from trusted resources like the Association for Gravestone Studies and the National Park Service, and train volunteers thoroughly before setting them this task.



Even light landscaping clean-up can make a big difference.

Maintenance and landscaping: In most cases, it is appropriate to use volunteer labor to clean up the cemetery. Clearing brush and invasive plants, moving fallen limbs, raking leaves, repairing or installing fences and signage, picking up litter, and planting and maintaining gardens are all good volunteer tasks. If you're going to need tools like shovels, trowels, saws, ladders, etc., provide them if you can. Some home improvement stores and even libraries have tools available for rental. If your participants are bringing their own tools from home, do a basic inspection before they begin work to make sure they are stable and functional enough for the purpose. You won't get too far with rusty or broken tools.

Mowing is a higher-stakes activity but can be done with training and supervision to avoid accidental damage. Mowing in a cemetery with historic gravestones on uneven ground is not like mowing a residential yard and mowers and even string trimmers can do tremendous damage if they hit the stones.

It's important to note that not every job is appropriate for volunteers, unless they are specially trained by professionals or this is their profession.

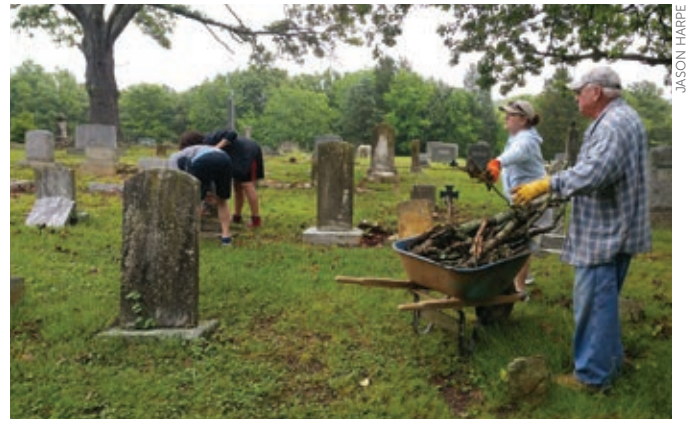
Things like resetting fallen gravestones or strenuous or dangerous landscaping work like dealing with downed trees or heavy erosion could mean calling for help with a company that handles these things and owns the heavy equipment for larger jobs.



More serious marker cleaning should be handled by professionals.

Maintenance and landscaping are the most important steps for deterring vandalism and undesirable activity. The first concern many cemetery preservationists have is wanting to protect their site and/or stop problem behavior that's already happened at their site. The best way to do this is to show that people care about the cemetery and are keeping it up, and that it's not just an abandoned space where people can dump trash or engage in unwanted activities. Important first projects with volunteers could include clean-up days where you remove fallen branches and trash, installing fencing and signs, placing flags or flowers on graves, restoring footpaths or parking lots, and repairing visible damage and deterioration. People are less likely to harm a space that looks maintained and well-visited, and even modest efforts can convey the message that a cemetery is a sacred space that should be respected.

Christ Lutheran Church Cemetery in Stanley, North Carolina, is a large cemetery in a small town that was dealing with some vandalism. We organized clean-up days to clear brush and trees and improve the site's visibility. Even though the cemetery was along a main road, the vandalism was



Clean-up at the Christ Lutheran Church Cemetery focused on removing brush and trees to improve visibility at the site and deter vandalism.

occurring along that road, indicating that people thought they wouldn't get caught because no one was paying attention to the cemetery. We concentrated our efforts along that road so the cemetery looked maintained, clean, and active from that angle and that helped curb vandalism.

A good group of volunteers can do an incredible amount of maintenance work in a small time. With a clear plan and assigned tasks, you can have a work morning from 9 am to noon then have a picnic lunch in the cemetery together afterward. People can accomplish a lot in the right conditions of guidance and motivation.

Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis, Tennessee, has a program called Cradle Gardening where volunteers sign up to adopt a cradle (oval monument type that forms an enclosure around a grave that resembles a cradle or bathtub rim) and plant it with flowers. The cemetery holds regular orientation and interest sessions to draw in community members. This is a great example that involves locals in cemetery work through the gardening hobby they already enjoy, and the work they do to beautify the site promotes protection and appreciation by others.

Safety First

When it comes to physical work in cemeteries, you must have a safety plan and training for volunteers to mitigate potential risks. Cemeteries that need help may be overgrown, eroding, have uneven ground, lack water or shade, have insects or wildlife present, and may be far from medical care.



Elmwood's Cradle Gardening program has drawn new audiences into volunteering in Memphis, and they hold regular orientations to nurture the volunteer pipeline.

Risks can include sunburn, insect bites/stings, falls, mold exposure, dehydration, and work injuries. Depending on your location, there may be certain plants like poison ivy that could be especially hazardous. Some organizations have participants sign a basic liability form before engaging in physical work.

Be proactive about what can happen. Bring a pop-up tent or canopy for shade, camp chairs, and water for hot days and encourage people to take breaks. Advise participants on bringing hats, sunscreen, masks, safety goggles, gloves, and bug spray, and have a first-aid kit on hand. Be mindful of local wildlife like snakes and spiders and their seasonal activity levels. Know where the nearest medical center is in case of emergency, and know if anyone in the group has any kind of medical or safety training ahead of time. Ask your volunteers ahead of time about medical concerns or allergies, and be mindful of participants' physical capabilities when assigning jobs. Brief your crew ahead of time on what poisonous plants and animals look like in your area and what to do if they encounter them.

Have people work in pairs if possible, especially if they're going to be working beyond shouting distance of others or the work carries some risk. Save cell numbers somewhere easily accessible, and consider walkie talkies or whistles if cell service is spotty and you're covering a lot of ground.



JASON HARPE

Communication and Recognition

Clearly communicating expectations and guidelines and recognizing people for their efforts are both essential for retaining volunteers and growing your volunteer base. I'll emphasize again that one of the most important things when you're working with volunteers is to ask them what they like to do. One way to lose a volunteer is to just give them stuff to do without knowing if they even like it. People volunteer to give back to a cause they believe in, but also to derive some personal satisfaction and joy from the work. There will always be some grunt work that nobody particularly loves, but try to match people with jobs they want to do and can succeed in.

Communicating the goals and importance of the group's work is also essential for getting buy-in and maintaining motivation. One cemetery group leader I know said the key to accomplishing big things and maintaining enthusiasm among volunteers is making sure everyone involved understands the mission and exactly what the needs and goals are, and that we don't stray from them. Anyone who decides they don't want to be a part of that is no longer involved with the



JAMES ST. JOHN/UNSPLOSH

Brief your volunteers on dangers they may encounter during work, like poison ivy.



Volunteering serves the cemetery preservation mission, but also serves the desires of individuals for meaningful work and socializing with others to support an important cause.

organization. Everyone has a clear understanding of how their work helps the mission of preserving their cemetery, and everyone knows why that preservation work is important. People are also eager to get and stay involved with something that feels special and meaningful, so you can continually remind them what all their work really means.

It's also crucial to recognize people for their work. Always express gratitude for the time and effort they give to a project, and for how their work furthers the larger goals. Recognize them regularly, whether that's with a verbal thank you, an award or certificate, or a group gathering celebrating the work. Have a celebration

when you complete a project or put up a new sign or historical marker. People want to feel like they contributed to something larger than themselves, so make sure you're telling them how they did that. It also helps curb burnout when people feel appreciated for their labor and builds camaraderie so they stick with the group. The social function of volunteering is also significant—many people volunteer to get out of the house and meet new people, so make sure they have time and space to accomplish that as well.

Cemeteries are essential historic and cultural resources that deserve preservation, recognition, awareness, and advocacy. Volunteers are so important for accomplishing these goals. Every contribution helps, from folks with time to give weekly to the sporadic workday helpers. Make sure your volunteers always have a clear understanding of your organization's mission regarding your cemetery and its preservation. People want to be part of something special, so make their experience special. Keep volunteers informed of all that's going on and utilize your volunteer-specific skill sets that can be advantageous to the preservation of your cemetery. Give volunteers a little variety in their tasks and show them they are appreciated on a regular basis. And at the end of the day, do no harm.



Jason Harpe has 25 years of experience in the field of historic preservation in both the public and private sectors and is currently Director of Cemetery Conservation for Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc. He is a certified gravestone and monument conservator and a Professional Member of the American Institute for Conservation. Contact Jason at jharpe@rgaincorporated.com.

ELMWOOD CEMETERY



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(continued from page 18)

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Preparing for Disaster Recovery

By Kimberly Flook



Fire-damaged remains of the U.S. Seamen's Hospital (U.S. Marine Hospital) in Lahaina Historic District.

In recent years, disasters of all sizes and types have become more prevalent around the world. From wildfires and flooding to more everyday concerns like water leaks or electrical fires, history organizations and their collections are vulnerable to damage and destruction from unexpected sources. As such, organizations of any size or capacity need to put practices in place to prepare for, weather, and ultimately recover from these events.

The goal of this leaflet is to lay out five tasks that can be completed *before* a disaster that will place an organization in the best possible position to efficiently recover. Each task offers multiple levels of investment, so this guide will also highlight the actions that are most impactful, least costly, and least time-consuming.

As a case study, we'll examine the 2023 Lahaina fire in Hawaii and its effect on the historic sites, collections, and museums of the Lahaina Restoration Foundation. The Lahaina fire destroyed an entire town, with 102 lives and 2,200 buildings lost. In terms of historic and cultural effect, over 900 buildings older than fifty years were destroyed, along with the entirety of the Lahaina National Historic Landmark area.

While this leaflet will use lessons learned from the 2023 wildfires, the techniques outlined are scalable for all kinds of situations that could damage your site and all levels of destruction, from room-sized damage to community-wide disasters. These are steps all organizations should take before disaster strikes to minimize potential loss of information, artifacts, and the ability to serve our communities.

TASK 1:

Storage – Safeguard Your Information

Beyond damage to physical spaces and objects, the loss of information is one of the most difficult things to experience for a cultural or historic organization. By safeguarding your information, you can mitigate this loss, saving information and stories even if the original documents and artifacts are destroyed.

Furthermore, to receive assistance needed to recover from a disaster, it is essential to report thoroughly. This will be true for insurance companies, disaster assistance, settlement/lawsuit claims, and even donors. While each group may want different information for different reasons, they will all want the details of what was lost and an accounting of what that loss means to the organization.

The best way to achieve this is through data storage. The best data storage solution combines several methods: physical files for essential originals, local digital files for immediate access, and cloud-based storage for maximum resilience. But if you must choose one, choose the cloud. Cloud storage enables quick access, collaboration, and recovery without depending on local devices that may be damaged or lost during a disaster. The cloud offers:

- Rapid recovery: data can be accessed from any new or remote hardware.
- Remote collaboration: when regular workspaces are compromised, multiple users can remotely collaborate on work with real-time updates.
- Secure redundancy: data is stored in multiple locations for fail-proof retrieval.
- Seamless sharing: all entities requesting post-disaster reports prefer digital records.

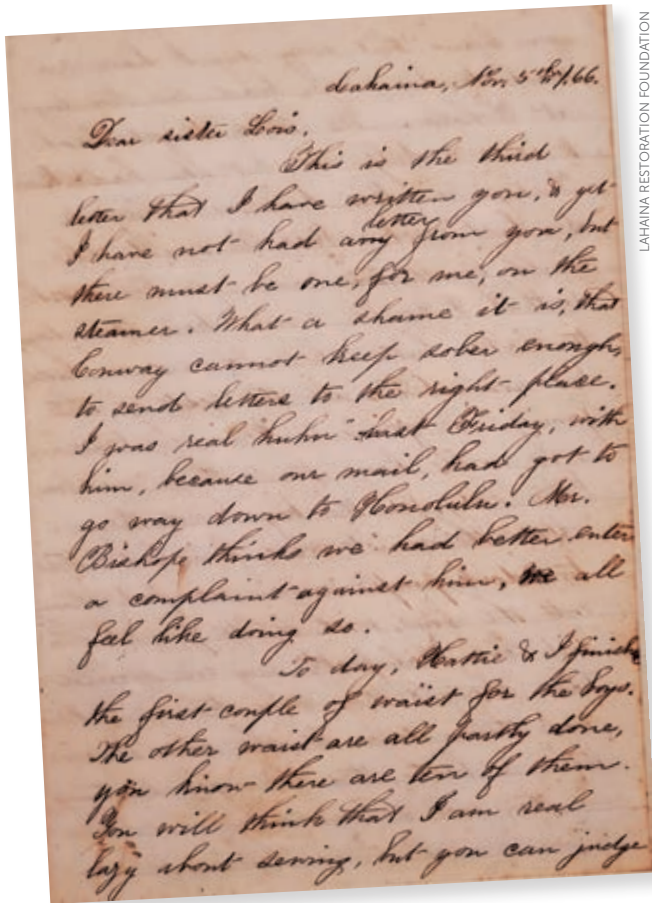
When choosing a cloud storage system, technology and software options change rapidly. Here are some key factors to consider when choosing a cloud storage system:

- Do you already use software that includes cloud storage?
 - Most major software systems come with some level of cloud storage, and some have grant opportunities for non-profits to expand beyond free storage levels.
- Are you backing up photos/videos, files, or full computers?
 - Different systems offer varying levels of backup.
- What are the costs?
 - It may be worth paying for cloud backup services beyond free storage, but long-term costs can add up.
- What cloud storage is compatible with the hardware you use?
 - Some cloud storages are cross-platform, while others are tied to specific operating systems.
- How accessible is the cloud storage system to the entities that will need reporting?
 - Some government organizations are not allowed to use certain cloud-based systems due to their policies.

DATA STORAGE TIPS:

- Keep only legally required physical copies—such as grant or tax documents with original signatures—and of course, archival material.
- Store physical copies off-site, ideally in another town or a different environment. Note: Bank deposit boxes and safes do not always survive disasters.
- Avoid scattering digital files across staff devices or external drives. Instead, consolidate files in one managed digital location, and then back it up.
- Traditional hardware or drives can become lost or corrupted. Back up on multiple physical devices if possible.
- Software can corrupt data when importing files. In the case of the 2023 Lahaina wildfire, files uploaded to PastPerfect from an external drive had missing or corrupted images.
- While it is the most expensive, the most impactful solution is to back up the full computer. After a disaster, the information, file system, and even desktop/home page layout of a destroyed computer can be restored to pre-event condition with the purchase of a new computer and a relatively quick upload of the backup.

It is essential to create some form of backup. Two copies of any type offer a much better chance for information to survive a disaster.



Even without access to a high-quality scanner, an acceptable image can be captured with a modern cell phone. The goal is to capture the at-risk information rather than to create the perfect image.

TASK 2:
Scan Important Documents

Once a data storage approach has been chosen and established, the next task is to capture all documents to be retained. This includes, but is not limited to, invoices/receipts for all physical property, leases/memorandums of understanding/memorandums of agreement, financial and organizational records, and historical archives.

The most basic level to achieve would be to keep two sets of physical copies of all important documents. One set may be stored locally for accessibility, but the second set should be stored off-site. This will limit the chance that a widespread disaster will destroy both sets.

A better approach, which should not take significantly more time or resources than making physical copies, is to make digital copies. Most printers can now scan as well as copy and print, but even a photo taken with a cell phone and a steady hand can save a lot of information that will be important post-disaster. Basic photos of key documents can preserve vital information if taken clearly and stored safely.

With either approach, make sure that the documents are as up-to-date as possible. This is critical for establishing responsibility and ownership during government assistance, legal settlement, and insurance claim reviews.

TASK 3:
Inventory All Property

When creating reports needed for disaster assistance, depending on memory is unlikely to succeed. The chance of remembering every piece of office furniture, every historic document, every tool, etc., is highly unlikely, especially in the tension- and anxiety-filled aftermath of a disaster.

The answer is to inventory everything. Not just your museum collections and archives, but also things such as office furnishings, maintenance and landscape equipment, event materials, and supplies.

This inventory will be important not only for replacing lost items and materials so that business can return to normal, but also for justifying grant requests, receiving insurance payouts, and receiving disaster assistance. With that in mind, for accurate evaluations and replacement estimates, it is important to record details like brand, purchase date, and specifications.

The good news is that the inventory does not need to be a written document. In fact, a visual inventory is often more efficient, accurate, and detailed.

APPROACH 1:
Photography

The best approach is to photograph every room and item—from collections and equipment to offices and storage areas. This not only captures every item in place but also captures the details of the individual items.

METHODOLOGY:

1. Start with an anchor photo from the entry point of the room.
2. Then, photograph each wall systematically.
 - a. Go clockwise or counterclockwise around the room, but stay consistent from room to room.
3. Take close-ups of individual items.
 - a. Photograph in the same direction (e.g., left to right and up to down) for each wall.
4. Capture labels, brands, and serial numbers.
 - a. This is important for items where these details affect the valuation of the item.
5. End with the same anchor photo.
 - a. Photos are easier to group within the storage system when there is a clear beginning and ending image.



LAHAINA RESTORATION FOUNDATION

After a disaster, it will be important to list and prove ownership of everything affected. This list goes far beyond the objects and archives of a collection.

APPROACH 2:

Video

While an effective approach to inventory, photography can be cumbersome, especially in terms of the number and size of the files needed and the time it takes to take the photos. In some cases, videos may be a better approach. They often require less storage and take less time to create but capture similar information.

METHODOLOGY:

1. Start videoing from the entry to the room.
2. Then, video each wall systematically.
 - a. Go clockwise or counterclockwise around the room, but stay consistent from room to room.
3. Scan both vertically and horizontally to capture full detail.
 - a. Scan in the same direction (e.g., left to right and up to down) for each wall for consistency.
4. Move slowly and steadily, pausing 3–5 seconds on each item.
 - a. A video captured too quickly results in footage that is too blurry to serve as valid proof for appraisers or disaster assistance agencies.
5. Open drawers, cabinets, and closets within the room.
 - a. Maintain the same consistent approach to scanning as with the walls.
6. Finish videoing in the same location that you began the video.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO TIPS

- Document each room separately.
- Use the best available lighting and minimize the use of a flash.

- Good lighting is important for capturing true color and detail.
- The use of a flash can wash out or hide important details.
- Use the highest resolution setting possible.
 - While this will increase file size, it will also capture details that are important for post-disaster valuations.
- Update photos annually or after major purchases.
 - Photos/videos that are more than a year old may lead to proof of ownership disputes at the time of disaster.
- Enable date and location stamp settings.
 - This is important for proof of ownership.
- Don't forget to record all areas, including attics, basements, closets, and bathrooms.
 - These areas will hold supplies, consumables, and equipment that are easily forgotten during disaster loss reporting.

It's important to keep in mind that different types of inventories are better for different situations. Videos may be best for full-room walkthroughs and up-to-date proof of ownership, while photos may be best for individual objects, particularly those with details that affect post-disaster valuations.

TASK 4:

Naming and Organizing Files

Now that a storage system has been chosen, documents have been scanned, and visual inventories have been created, it is important to develop a naming convention that will assist in understanding this information.

Naming files can be very time-consuming. The best practice is to name each individual file and folder in a consistent and clear manner, but ultimately, this may not be the most practical or useful approach for every organization.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Would naming folders rather than naming individual files be more efficient while still achieving the goal of understanding the information?
 - This is especially true if you will only need to use the files after a disaster occurs.
 - It is not a good use of resources to spend time not only capturing but also naming individual files year after year.
- Is naming individual files key to understanding the contents of the file without having to open the file?
 - This is important for files that have a use beyond disaster recovery, such as for budgeting or grant reporting.

AASLH



Consistency and clarity are key for naming conventions.

Each organization will have to balance the level of naming with the resources available. Consider how much time for naming files will be available before a disaster occurs versus during recovery when there will be many demands on your resources and yet the naming will be required for outside reporting.

Keep in mind that when choosing a naming convention for files that will be used after a disaster, consider information that will be shared outside of the organization. The chosen naming approach should be intuitive to an outsider, and in some cases, may need to follow an external naming convention. The most important consideration, however, is consistency.

METHODOLOGY:

1. Choose the naming level: folder or file.
 - a. This may be different for different types of files.
2. Choose a naming convention that is consistent.
 - a. Naming may be tied to existing naming conventions.
 - For example, linking collection images to existing accession numbers.

- b. Naming may be tied to floor plans or other location documents.
 - For example, the folder or file may be named in a way that is linked to a room numbering system.
- c. Naming may be a brand new system decided upon by staff.

3. Create a guide to the naming convention for those doing the work and those who will do the work in the future.

This will help with consistency over time as well as help those outside the organization understand the system.

NAMING CONVENTION TIPS:

- Decide on the essential elements for your file names and put them in a consistent order.
 - Possibilities include project name, object/document name, date, location, etc.
- Keep file names as short as possible while capturing needed information.
 - Some cloud storage systems have character limits (usually around 250 characters) for the name of a file.
 - Cloud storage uses a naming system that acts as an address for the file, so the character limit includes any folder names within which the file is stored.
 - For example, while a file name might be “1989.079.0011 - Butter Plate,” a cloud storage file name would be “Users\UserName\OneDrive - Lahaina Restoration Foundation\Desktop\Hale Aloha Artifacts\Collections Room\1989.079.0011 - Butter Plate.”
 - If the character limit is exceeded, files can corrupt or become unopenable.
- Avoid special characters and spaces.
 - To prevent compatibility issues, use underscores, hyphens, or camelCase instead of spaces or special characters.
- If you need to sort files in a particular way, think carefully of the order of elements in the file name.
 - To sort chronologically, use YYYYMMDD date format at the beginning of the file name.
 - To sort numerically, use leading zeros for sequential numbers.
 - For example, numbers 1–9 and 10 would be 001–009 and 010.

Putting Your System Together

The four tasks outlined above can intertwine to create a system that safeguards information and is useful for general operating needs, but also becomes critical for post-disaster recovery. Each of the four tasks offers solutions that range from low to high impact, low to

high cost, and low to high use of resources. The goal is to find a level your organization can achieve for each task and then tie the tasks together in a feasible way to create a plan that fits your situation.

On the next page are quick reference charts for the pros and cons of each task and its solutions to help you decide how to prioritize your resources. It's important to keep in mind that even if you cannot achieve all these tasks or reach the highest level of a task, anything is better than nothing, and any effort you can make will be incredibly helpful during disaster recovery.

It would be nice to say that the Lahaina Restoration Foundation had the above solutions in place before the 2023 Lahaina fire, but that was not true. Some systems were in place but not specifically designed for disaster recovery. This led to full loss of key information in some cases and recovery of only low-quality information in others.

The best thing we did was back up our computers daily. This was originally to protect against simple hardware failure but, ultimately, meant that we were back to work with all files available in a matter of days after the fire. We were able to use pre-fire videos and photos taken for social media or marketing to create post-disaster visual inventories, but the quality was often not up to necessary standards, and much information was lost. Very few of our thousands of photos and videos were named or in folders, and most were spread over a shared Dropbox and individual staff phones and computers. It took two staff members working more than a hundred hours to organize everything for it to be useful for disaster assistance reporting.

We did not have consistent images of our spaces and the items that they contained. This resulted in less available proof of ownership for disaster reporting. Our only surviving invoices, receipts, and financial documents were those that had been created or sent to us digitally. All other financial records were paper and thus lost.

TASK 5:

Be a Part of Your Community

While the tasks outlined above assemble internal systems that can be put into place to smooth the process of disaster recovery, there are also external connections that will be incredibly important. One of the easiest and most important tasks to undertake is to be a true member of your community. You need to know your local first responders and emergency personnel now, before a disaster strikes. Get to know them, offer tours of your facility, explain your collections and their needs and vulnerabilities, and they will be better prepared to assist you when it matters most.

Early access to properties after a disaster is critical for quickly assessing damage and recovering salvageable



FEMA, U.S. Fire Administration, and Hawaii governor Josh Green tour Lahaina's fire damage.

objects. Disaster agencies and the traditional disaster response timeline often do not consider cultural and historic collections needs, as they are more focused on life safety and residential and commercial recovery. In a crisis, your community becomes your most powerful asset. Partnerships built before a disaster will open doors and offer support above and beyond those offered through traditional disaster assistance programs and agencies. When your community knows your value, they will help advocate for your aid and recovery after a disaster.

After the 2023 Lahaina wildfire disaster, the Lahaina Restoration Foundation first gained access to its damaged historic sites and museums through general community connections rather than through government agencies, disaster groups, or professional historic/cultural organizations. It was through police officers, construction workers, and arborists that staff members gained safety training and access to the disaster zone for assessment and recovery work at the historic sites. In fact, these connections granted access, on average, four months earlier than what would have been possible through the established governmental disaster response timeline.

That early access made a significant difference in the recovery efforts. Entire historic structures in Lahaina only remained salvageable due to that early access that allowed for more rapid assessment and stabilization. The 1834 Baldwin Home Museum would have been a complete loss without immediate post-disaster access that allowed for stabilization of seriously compromised walls. Only early intervention enabled by community partners saved this site.

Furthermore, early access and training prepared staff members for artifact recovery from the historic sites. Objects recovered within weeks of the disaster were in a much better condition and have a higher chance of successful restoration than those that were recovered

STORAGE SOLUTIONS

	Cost	Storage	Impact
Physical copies	✓ Low – file cabinets and physical folders	✗ High – paper takes up a lot of space and needs file cabinets.	✗ Low – regardless of the type of disaster, paper is frequently destroyed, resulting in a loss of information.
Digital storage	✓ Low – external hard drive or existing computer	✓ Low storage resources – external hard drives and computers are compact.	● Medium – in some types of disasters (mold, building damage), equipment has a good chance of survival, while in other disasters (fire, water), equipment may be destroyed, resulting in a loss of information.
Cloud storage	● Low to high – can range from free or grant-funded storage to an IT team that backs up the full system.	✓ Low storage resources – cloud storage requires no digital or physical storage capacity.	✓ High – information is fully protected and redundantly backed up.

INVENTORY APPROACHES

	Cost	Storage	Impact
Spreadsheet	✗ High time resources – typing up descriptions and all pertinent information is extremely time-consuming.	✓ Low – spreadsheets take very little digital storage capacity.	✗ Low – for disaster assistance reporting, it is difficult to gather enough information for proper valuations.
Photography	✗ High time resources – for full documentation, a large number of photos need to be captured.	✗ High – high resolution photos can take prohibitive amounts of storage capacity.	✓ High – the detail in a photographic inventory offers a clear record for ownership and valuation information for disaster assistance reporting.
Video	✓ Low time resources – videos can record entire collections much more quickly than other inventory approaches.	● Medium storage resources – high resolution videos take large amounts of storage capacity, but usually less than individual photos.	✓ High – for all but the highest value or difficult to capture pieces, videos can quickly capture the details needed for disaster assistance reporting.

SCANNING POSSIBILITIES

	Cost	Impact
Physical copies	✓ Low – paper and toner	✗ Low – regardless of type of disaster, paper is frequently destroyed, resulting in a loss of information.
Digital copies – copier	✗ High – copier or copying services	✓ High – post-disaster, you will have high-quality digital copies with accessible information and the possibility to replicate original documents.
Digital copies – photograph	✓ Low – existing equipment, e.g., cell phones, for scanning	● Medium – post-disaster you will have digital copies with information that is accessible, but unlikely to be usable to fully replicate the original documents.

NAMING CONVENTIONS

	Cost	Impact
Folder naming	✓ Low time resources – naming folders is a quick and easy organizational solution.	✗ Low – While folder naming organizes data, significant additional organization will be needed post-disaster.
File naming	✗ High time resources – naming files can be time consuming depending on the number of files involved.	● Medium – file naming will allow for file sharing post-disaster with minimal further organization. Some disaster assistance agencies will require organized folders for sharing.
Folder and file naming	✗ High time resources – naming folders and files can be time consuming depending on the number of files involved.	✓ High – folder and file naming will allow for file sharing post-disaster without further organization and should meet requirements of most disaster assistance for reporting.

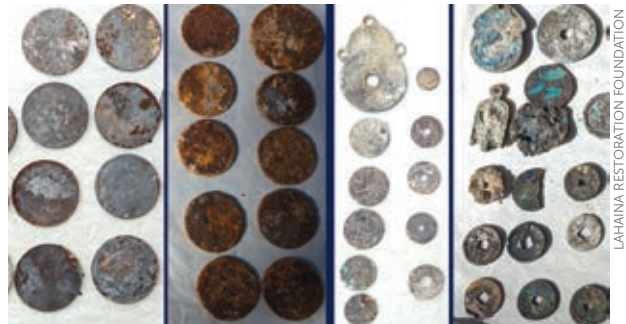
following the governmental disaster timeline. Those objects were exposed to the elements for months, did not receive immediate treatment for fire and water damage, and suffered much more deterioration as a result. Most objects recovered using traditional disaster access were past saving since they had been left so long.

Regardless of how access is achieved post-disaster, nothing is more important than life safety and community respect. Saving physical objects should never be at the expense of human life or respect for neighbors and their losses. It is only after search and rescue, recovery of remains, and hazardous material removal are complete at the community level and staff training, recovery planning, and safety systems are in place at the organization level that access should be attempted.

The truth is that it is almost impossible to be fully prepared for a disaster. There are usually too many threats along with too many limitations to truly prepare for all possibilities. However, with the tasks outlined above, navigating and recovering from a disaster can become much easier. Completing even a portion of the tasks outlined in this leaflet will greatly assist with disaster recovery, particularly with the necessary reporting to those who are best placed to assist: insurance companies, FEMA, state and local governments, grantors, and donors. Hopefully a disaster will never befall your site, but being proactive about documentation, storage, and community relationships can make all the difference if it does.



Kimberly Flook is the Deputy Executive Director of the Lahaina Restoration Foundation and president of the Hawaii Museums Association. Her experience includes work at ten historic sites and museums over twenty-four years as a museum professional, including fifteen years as a museum director and nine years heading exhibition, curatorial, and education teams. She can be reached at Kimberly@LahainaRestoration.org.



The left image of each pair shows items recovered four months prior to the items in the right image. The difference in condition is striking.



The Old Lahaina Courthouse, built in the 1850s by the Kingdom of Hawaii, is one of nine historic buildings owned or managed by the Lahaina Restoration Foundation that were severely damaged or destroyed during the 2023 Lahaina wildfire disaster.

RESOURCES

- American Alliance of Museums, Developing a Disaster Preparedness/Emergency Response Plan, aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Developing-a-Disaster-Plan-2018.pdf.
- American Institute for Conservation Emergency Programs and Assistance, culturalheritage.org/resources/emergencies.
- National Park Service Museum Handbook, Chapter 10: Emergency Planning, nps.gov/subjects/museums/upload/MHI_Ch10_EmergencyPlanning.pdf.
- Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative resources, culturalrescue.si.edu/resources.
- Unger, Jessica. AASLH Technical Leaflet #275, Staying Connected: Developing/Maintaining Emergency Contact Lists, learn.aaslh.org/products/technical-leaflet-275-staying-connected-developingmaintaining-emergency-contact-lists.

Your Museum Store FOR THE 250th: Profit, Purpose, Powerhouse

By Melody Cabán

KAT HENNESSEY



VENICE MUSEUM



As the United States approaches its Semiquincentennial, museums and public history organizations have a unique opportunity to harness the power of their museum stores. Beyond simply generating revenue, your store serves as a crucial connection, providing visitors with tangible links to the history you present and extending the reach of your exhibitions and programs.

This article offers practical strategies and recommendations to help your team plan your museum store's role in America's 250th birthday. It aims to transform your store into a dynamic extension of your interpretive mission, enhancing revenue and fostering lasting connections with visitors as they "exit through the gift shop" with a piece of your institution's unique story in hand. And although it focuses on tying your store's activities and products into your overall 250th efforts, the advice on choosing merchandise, marketing, and reporting is evergreen and can be used by any site with a retail operation at any time.

While your institution plans its 250th initiatives, from special exhibitions to educational programs, an important question arises: is your museum store truly integrated into this monumental effort? Often relegated to a separate operational silo, the museum store, when strategically aligned, can significantly enhance your programming and earned revenue potential.

The first, and perhaps most crucial, step is to invite your museum store onto your 250th planning work. Look around that meeting table when you're talking 250: if your store manager, buyer, or a retail operations representative isn't present, you're missing a vital piece of the puzzle. Without their early and consistent involvement, the store risks being an afterthought, unable to fully capitalize on the themes, plans, and visitor traffic generated by this event.

The Strategic Value of Early Inclusion

When it comes to merchandise, timing is everything. Sourcing merchandise and developing custom products can be a slow and meticulous process. Rushing can cause items to miss the mark and come at a higher cost. Planning ahead allows for thoughtful product development, better pricing negotiations, and the creation of truly unique items that resonate with your mission. When museum store representatives are brought to the planning and programming table, the entire museum benefits.

- **Cohesive themes:** Products can be developed in direct alignment with exhibition themes, educational programs, and marketing campaigns, creating a seamless visitor journey. This helps reinforce the experience and creates a tangible memory. Imagine a visitor connecting with your great new exhibition, wanting to learn even more about the topic and share that knowledge with their friends and family, and then stepping foot into a store that doesn't have so much as a postcard that references it. That's a note we don't want our visitors to end on.
- **Inventory management:** Understanding projected visitor numbers and program schedules enables the store to forecast demand more accurately. This prevents overstocking of items or, conversely, running out of popular merchandise during peak times. Efficient inventory management directly impacts profitability and visitor satisfaction.
- **Marketing opportunities:** When the store is integrated into marketing plans, its unique offerings can be featured in museum newsletters, social media campaigns, and press releases. This cross-promotional synergy maximizes visibility for both the museum's programs and the store's products.



Museum stores come in all shapes and sizes, and should be integral to the site's mission.

- **Product development:** Early collaboration makes room for creativity. Store managers and buyers, with their knowledge of market trends and visitor preferences, can work holistically to create custom products that truly capture the essence of your museum’s 250th programs and plans.

To integrate your museum store into the Semiquincentennial, proactive conversations are crucial. A key question I like to ask everyone at the table is: “What museum store events or products would surprise and delight visitors who attend our Semiquincentennial programs and why?” Below are a selection of questions, divided by job area, to start conversations with staff and volunteers:

CURATORIAL:

- What are the key narratives, objects, and figures that will be featured in our 250th exhibitions?
- How can the store’s products help expand on the stories told within the exhibitions, offering visitors a deeper dive into certain topics? Think exhibit catalogues, related books, or artwork.

EDUCATION:

- What educational programs are planned for the 250th? Consider workshops, family days, school tours, and digital learning initiatives.
- How can the museum store develop or carry products (activity books, educational kits, interactive games) that complement and extend the learning experience both at the museum and at home?



Kids’ items can tie into educational programs.

MARKETING:

- How can we jointly promote the museum store’s 250th merchandise through our various channels (website, social media, email newsletters, press releases)?
- What visual assets (like photos and videos) of the products can be shared for marketing purposes?

DEVELOPMENT/FUNDRAISING:

- Are there opportunities to create special events, donor tier merchandise, or exclusive products for members and high-level donors?
- How can the store support cultivation and stewardship efforts, perhaps by offering unique gifts for major donors or sponsoring store events for members?

VISITOR SERVICES:

- How can we ensure a seamless and welcoming experience for visitors in the museum store, especially with increased traffic during the 250th?
- What training do visitor services staff need to answer questions about 250th merchandise and programming, ensuring consistent messaging across all visitor touchpoints?



Partner with local artisans to offer unique products and demonstrations.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

- Are there opportunities to partner with local artists and community groups to co-create products that highlight their unique historical connections to the 250th?
- Can the store host community-focused events or pop-ups that showcase local history and craftsmanship?

Generating Earned Revenue

While revenue generation isn’t the sole objective of a museum store, it’s a key factor for many. According to data from the Museum Store Association, museum stores contribute 5 to 25 percent of their museum’s annual revenue. This revenue is a strategic investment in the future sustainability of your institution, enabling you to deliver on your mission.

Here are some key recommendations to maximize your store’s earned revenue potential:

- **Set clear key performance indicators (KPIs) and expectations:** Establish measurable revenue goals, such as average transaction value and conversion rates (how many visitors buy something in addition to their museum ticket). Regularly monitoring these KPIs gives you insights into your store’s performance.
- **Develop comprehensive product budgets:** Create budgets that account for inventory costs, marketing, and potential increases in staff hours for events.
- **Implement a strategic pricing strategy:** Carefully consider your profit margins when developing or pricing products. This involves understanding your cost of goods sold, desired margin, and the competitive landscape. Be mindful of rising shipping costs and tariffs, which can impact item costs to you.
- **Analyze sales data:** Regularly review data to identify best-selling products and understand purchasing patterns to make informed decisions about inventory and promotions.
- **Promote memberships and donations:** The museum store is an ideal location to promote museum memberships and solicit donations. Highlight any member discounts you may offer.

Case Study: The Alutiiq Museum (Alaska)

The Alutiiq Museum in Kodiak, Alaska sought to improve its store’s financial strategy after a significant renovation. To transform the store, we worked to create streamlined, user-friendly reports. The goal was to establish a clear baseline and

track progress toward increasing earned revenue. By focusing on KPIs and simplifying the reporting process, we were able to gain valuable insights into the store's performance.

The new process allowed the Alutiiq Museum to review its sales data more efficiently while also gaining the flexibility of delegating the task when necessary. This change made it easier to analyze sales trends and make strategic decisions about inventory and promotions. The new, less manual process provided a clearer understanding of what items sold, when, and to whom so they can grow their future earned revenue.

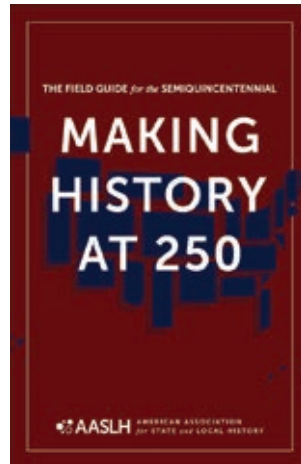
Products That Tell America's Story

While generic flag pins and Americana items certainly have their place in retail environments, your museum store has a much richer purpose. Your museum store is not just a shop; it's an extension of the museum's mission. The Semiquincentennial is a chance to tell the multitude of American stories our communities hold. Just as exhibits and programs share the full story of our nation, stores can also go beyond dated souvenirs to extend that story into our products.

Your museum store is your "final exhibit." Products allow visitors to purchase items that inspire and delight them, and to take a piece of your story home with them. Thoughtfully curated items inspire continued exploration of your Semiquincentennial related history and beyond, creating lasting connections that extend far past the museum visit.

When selecting products for your museum store to go with 250th initiatives, keep these strategic points in mind:

- **Align with your Semiquincentennial themes:** Begin by identifying your museum's specific 250th themes. You can draw inspiration from the themes in AASLH's "Making History at 250: The Field Guide for the Semiquincentennial" (available free at aaslh.org): Unfinished Revolutions, Power of Place, We the People, American Experiment, and Doing History. For instance, a "Power of Place" theme could inspire products that showcase local historical landmarks, unique regional maps, or artisan crafts representing local traditions. This ensures your products resonate deeply with your museum's narrative.
- **Strategize your timing:** Carefully consider the arrival times for all products, ensuring they'll be in stock for key events and throughout the duration of your institution's 250th celebration. Will your commemoration last all 2026, focus on



specific dates like July 4, or something different? Planning is essential to avoid missed opportunities. Work backward from key dates to establish production and shipping deadlines.

- **Navigate minimum order quantities (MOQs):** Minimum order quantities from suppliers can sometimes be a hurdle, especially for smaller sites or purchases of new items you aren't sure will sell. Explore creative solutions; for example, can you collaborate with other museums to place a combined order and meet MOQs?
- **Reflect your institution's values:** Look for products that align with your museum's core values beyond the history mission. This could mean sourcing items such as those that support diversity, are eco-friendly, made in the USA, from women-owned businesses, or are locally crafted.
- **Collaborate with your vendors:** Your vendors are valuable partners. Engage them in discussions about your Semiquincentennial plans. They often possess great insights into their own stock, effective display strategies, and what products might resonate well with your audience. Some might even be available for special pop-up events, adding an extra layer of engagement for your visitors.

Case Study: King's Chapel (Boston)

King's Chapel, a National Historic Landmark on Boston's Freedom Trail, faced a challenge familiar to many historical sites: its small public store didn't reflect the institution's rich history or mission. The limited space was filled with generic items, failing to connect with visitors and missing a key opportunity for both engagement and earned revenue.

To transform the store, we conducted in-depth research into the chapel's educational materials and collections. This process identified several core themes, with freedom emerging as a central concept.

Using this insight, we began curating new products based on the idea of "freedom" that would serve as a meaningful extension of the visitor experience. We brought in items like children's books and historic figure finger puppets to extend the learning experience. We also sourced products with a direct connection to the chapel, such as pocket bells inspired by its famous bell made in 1816 by the Revere and Son Foundry. To mitigate risk, products were purchased in small quantities to test their popularity before a larger investment was made, which was particularly crucial given the store's small storage capacity.

The change led to a notable increase in sales and, more importantly, created a powerful new way for visitors to connect with the chapel's history. The success of the project showed that a more meaningful retail experience could tie into the institution's mission. The new strategy also inspired future custom collections to further extend King's Chapel's mission.

*Y*our museum store is your "final exhibit" and products let visitors take a piece of your story home with them.



Many museum shops carry postcards, stickers, and mugs, but how unique are yours to your collections and stories?



Lost Buildings of Venice print on Hawaiian shirts and dog bandanas!

Custom Merchandise

Creating custom merchandise might seem daunting in terms of time, effort, and money,, but it's an incredible opportunity to extend your museum's story. Custom items can range from items bearing a photo of your site or organization's name like pens, hats, or Christmas ornaments, to more elaborate ventures like items featuring images of collection artifacts. Here's how to approach it effectively:

- **Highlight your unique history:** What aspects of your exhibits, local history, or collection are truly unique and directly tie into the 250th? Focus on these distinct elements to create merchandise that can't be found anywhere else. This might involve deep dives into your archives to uncover lesser-known stories, unique local traditions, or specific historical figures tied to your region.
- **Design for longevity:** While celebrating the Semiquincentennial is important, you can also debut custom items that will remain relevant beyond the celebrations. Evergreen products can become permanent fixtures in your store, reducing concerns about outdated inventory.
- **Collaborate locally:** Forge partnerships with local artists, designers, and manufacturers. This not only allows for bespoke products with authentic local flavor but also supports your local economy and community, strengthening your museum's ties within the region. This can be a powerful marketing story in itself.
- **Embrace editions:** Generate excitement with limited edition items. Think numbered prints, special edition books, or even small run special colors of items.
- **Packaging tells the story:** Don't underestimate the power of great packaging. Invest in designs that feature compelling images and narratives, directly connecting the product to your museum's mission and the 250th. Use QR codes on packaging to link to online resources, videos, or more in-depth stories about the product's inspiration. And always remember to clearly communicate that purchases support the museum!

Case study: Venice, Florida

The history organizations serving this Gulf Coast beach town have developed fascinating and profitable custom merchandise that combines local culture and museum artifacts into unforgettable products. Spearheaded by the city's Historical Resources Manager Harry Klinkhamer, Venice Historical Resources and its nonprofit partner Venice Heritage teamed up in 2019 to respond to a fashion popular in western Florida (Hawaiian shirts) with a desire to promote historic preservation. The "Lost Buildings of Venice" Hawaiian shirt was born, with colorful drawings of historic local buildings that no longer existed. Online and museum store sales boomed, pulling in more revenue in a week than they usually saw in three months. In 2020, they created a LEGO set of a beloved artifact, a 1926 fire truck nicknamed "Old Betsy," that visitors could assemble at home after seeing the truck on display.

Recommendations on a Budget

You do not have to craft a new store or an entirely new product mix to make a difference. There are many ways to add value while staying authentic to your mission.

- **Programming space:** The museum store can become a vibrant programming space itself. Host book signings, talks, pop-up events, or workshops related to Semiquincentennial themes. These events can drive traffic and position the store as an integral part of the visitor journey, extending the museum's educational reach into a retail environment.
- **Meaningful signage:** Add signage that enhances products by telling their story or connecting them to your museum. Perhaps you're asking your vendors and artisans what the 250th means to them and featuring their quotes, or adding special "staff picks" and a small blurb from historians, staff, or local legends explaining *why* they love a particular item and how it relates to the 250th. This personal touch adds depth and authenticity.
- **Merchandising:** The way products are presented can dramatically influence sales. Create engaging and thematic displays that tell a story. Use clear signage, compelling product descriptions, and thoughtful arrangements to draw visitors

in. Make connections with unexpected items. Consider interactive displays that encourage hands-on engagement with products.

- **Make use of your cross-departmental insights:** Lean into events, cross-promotion, and other opportunities working with your museum holistically can offer. It can be an organic way to introduce your store to a new audience.

Welcoming All

The Semiquincentennial is a chance for the entire museum to welcome the community and beyond. Your museum store staff serve as front-line ambassadors, answering questions, helping visitors, selling memberships, and adding depth to the guest experience. They are often the first and last point of contact for visitors, making their role crucial in shaping the overall museum experience.

The store also functions as a “third space,” a welcoming and engaging environment where visitors can relax, reflect, and connect with the museum’s mission. For first-time museum visitors, stores provide a familiar space. After all, we’ve all shopped, but a first trip to a museum can be intimidating. The informal, browse-friendly nature of a well-designed museum store can make it an accessible entry point for new audiences.

To ensure your museum store staff feel prepared and confident in their ambassadorial role during the Semiquincentennial, it’s crucial to check in with them regularly and address any concerns they might have about the upcoming celebrations. Taking the time to understand their needs and perspectives will empower them to provide an outstanding visitor experience. Alongside these check-ins, prioritize training to deepen product knowledge, update them on museum-wide events, and help them understand the “why” behind the 250th initiatives. Here are some key components for training store staffers as museum ambassadors:

- **Product knowledge:** Staff should be well versed in the stories behind the 250th-themed merchandise. This includes knowing its historical significance, the artists or manufacturers, and any unique features. Role-playing scenarios can help them practice articulating these stories effectively.
- **Point of sale (POS) system:** Shaky mastery of the POS system? Walk through POS headaches to help make sales go smoothly.
- **Museum-wide events and themes:** Ensure staff are fully informed about all 250th exhibitions, programs, and special events. This makes them ambassadors for the entire institution.
- **Customer service excellence:** Reinforce your best practices in customer service.

The Semiquincentennial offers an unparalleled opportunity for history organizations to engage new audiences and strengthen community connections. Your museum store has the power to inspire learning, ignite curiosity, and be a vital part of your mission. It’s also a powerful engine for earned revenue, directly contributing to your institution’s financial health and sustainability.



Book signings and other events can connect the shop to the larger educational mission.

The time, money, and resources you invest in preparing your museum store for the Semiquincentennial are investments in your organization’s future. New products, partnerships, and practices developed for this celebration can serve audiences and support your mission long after 2026. This forward-thinking approach ensures that your efforts for the 250th yield both immediate gains and long-term benefits for your bottom line.

Your museum store is more than a retail space; it’s a purpose-driven extension of your mission. I hope you use these tips and recommendations to make the most of your museum store, serving both your visitors and championing your mission, for the 250th and beyond.



Melody Cabán is a retail expert and consultant dedicated to empowering mission-driven organizations to put profit and purpose back into their retail operations. Contact her at melody@melodycabanconsulting.com.





BIRD IMAGES: NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY DIGITAL COLLECTIONS



When Deaccession Goes Wrong: The Long-Term Effects of One Institution's Missteps

By Erik R. Bauer

Deaccession is not a process to be taken lightly. Done correctly, it can help an institution refocus its collection, remove damaged or hazardous materials, and provide funds for the continued preservation or acquisition of a collection. However, when deaccession goes wrong, it can have long-term negative consequences to the institution. From losing community trust to incurring fines and negative publicity, a bad deaccession project can impact your organization's future and sustainability in major ways.

These Audubon prints are for illustration only, and do not depict the exact prints referenced in this article.



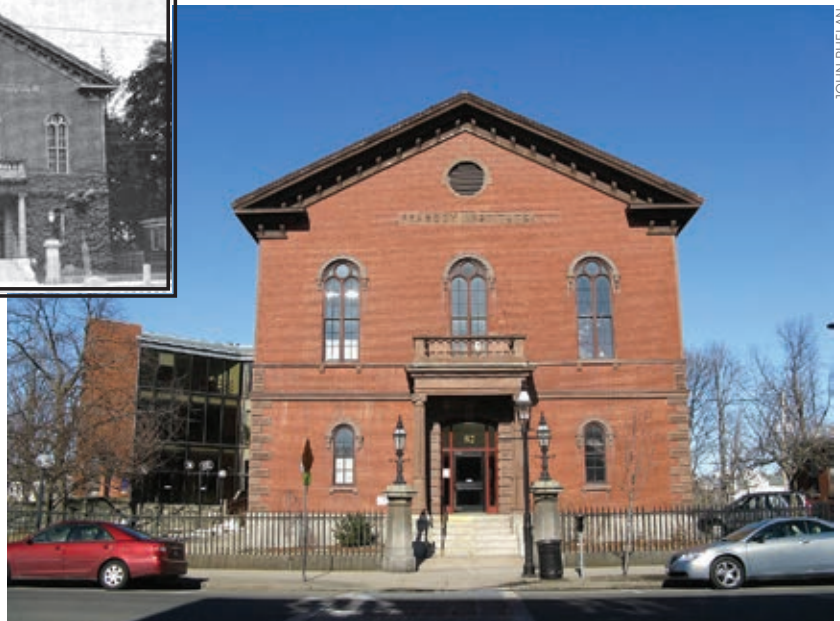
The Peabody Institute Library (PIL) in Peabody, Massachusetts, serves as a notable example of what can happen when deaccessioning is mishandled. In the early 1980s, the Library Trustees sought to deaccession and sell part of their collection of

John James Audubon prints, wanting to use the proceeds to preserve the remaining prints and make necessary updates to the Eben Dale Sutton Reference Room so that it could reopen to the public. The legal battles and public uproar that ensued made it difficult for subsequent deaccessions to happen that were needed to realign the collection with the institution's collections policy. If your organization has a checkered past with deaccessioning, or if you find yourself investigating whether past deaccessions ever actually happened at your site, this article may offer ideas for research and a sense of commiseration that deaccessioning has always been a process fraught with difficulty that can take a very long time.

To understand why many of the Trustees wanted to sell the Audubon prints, some historical perspective is necessary. When the PIL opened in 1854, there were two floors: the library on the first floor and a lyceum on the second floor. There was no area for reference materials until 1866, when Eliza Sutton, a local widow, sent a letter to the Library Trustees stating that she wished to donate \$20,000 to the PIL to build an addition that would serve as a reference room and hold books of enduring value. The room, named after her deceased son, Eben Dale Sutton, would be shortened to the Sutton Room.

Over the next several years, Eliza Sutton made several additional donations, including a four-volume set and a double elephant folio of 435 Audubon prints. After several months on display and public use, the prints were "much injured by visitors... and withdrawn." Over the years, the PIL continued to display the prints for viewing only. Then, in 1976, eighty-six of the Audubon prints were unbound and stolen by Michael Moskaluk, who claimed he was writing a book about John J. Audubon. Moskaluk gained unrestricted access to the prints because he visited every day. Due to a lack of staffing, he was provided with a key to the Sutton Room, allowing him to view the prints at his convenience. In March 1976, he claimed to have completed his research, but it was not until April that the prints were discovered to be missing.

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The Peabody Institute Library in 1899 and today.

After that theft, the remaining prints were stored in a non-climate-controlled vault.

In 1979, one of the volumes of prints was again put on display. The volume was placed in the main room in a case that was neither climate-controlled nor alarmed. In May of 1980, the folio on display was stolen and not recovered until September 1980. After the second theft, the four volumes were placed in a vault; however, they were deteriorating rapidly. The Library Trustees began considering deaccessioning the Audubon prints around 1984 and formally closed the Sutton Room, where materials lay dormant for the next twenty years.

The deaccessioning of materials from the Sutton Room had precedent. In 1914 and later in 1945, the PIL sold materials from the Sutton Room collection. What made those two deaccessions different was that the PIL had purchased the books sold (instead of receiving them as donations like the prints), they were not in good condition, and fell outside the scope of the PIL collections. The Audubon prints, on the other hand, were a gift made with the understanding that they would remain with the Library. The Trustees used the prior deaccessions as justification for the deaccessioning of the Audubon prints and, later, other materials from the collection.

Between 1984 and 1987, the Trustees petitioned the Massachusetts Probate and Family Court on several occasions regarding the action that could be taken with the Audubon prints. Long-time Library Trustee and



1827–1838

Audubon's *The Birds of America* illustrations are published.

1854

PIL opened with two floors: the library on the first floor and a lyceum on the second floor.

When Deaccession Goes Wrong:



1866

Eliza Sutton donates \$20,000 to build a reference room for PIL.



1914 and 1945

PIL deaccessioned and sold items from the Sutton Room.

1984

Trustees petition the court about deaccessioning Audubon prints.

Chairman Albert J. Cohen was one of the few Trustees who fought to retain the Audubon prints. At a special meeting of the Trustees in March of 1988, Cohen stated that a vote in 1981 was made to keep the prints and that the financial situation of Peabody had since improved, meaning the PIL could petition the City for funds or create a line item for the preservation of the prints in the library budget. Additionally, City Solicitor Lary O'Keefe informed Cohen that he could file a plan with the court by either representing the Trustees or hiring outside counsel.

The City Solicitor did not support the plan to deaccession the prints and stated that he might have to withdraw from representing the Trustees in court, as noted in the minutes of the Trustees from March 1987. In addition, O'Keefe explained at a special meeting of the Trustees in March of 1988 that the Trustees "are

in violation of the [Public] Trust, because the prints are in the vault. The Trustees have failed because we are not able to protect and preserve the prints [...] It is now necessary for the court to make a determination as to Mrs. Sutton's will. Trustee James Decoulos, who was a lawyer, represented the Trustees in court.

By February of 1988, the Attorney General of Massachusetts wrote to the Trustees with a plan to have the Peabody Museum, now the Peabody Essex Museum, enter into a joint venture whereby the Peabody Museum would conduct the conservation of the prints, and once conserved, have custody of the prints until the library is able to properly store and display the prints. There were also concerns about the "limitation of liability of the Peabody Museum to its gross negligence or willful default" at a special meeting in August of 1988. The prints would be returned to the Peabody Institute. The library Trustees rejected this plan because all the prints would have to be removed from the library for an unknown length of time and would not be returned until the Trustees had a plan and financial backing to preserve them.

On March 6, 1989, the Library Trustees formed a three-member Ad Hoc Committee on the Audubon

prints. The committee's goal was to find a suitable resolution for the Audubon prints and to reopen the Sutton Room to the public. The final report, issued in July of 1989, made several claims.

One was that when the library obtained dissolution of the corporation as a public charity in 1978, all funds and assets were to be turned over to the City of Peabody. Additionally, the Sutton Room had not been used for over fifteen years because the PIL had expanded and a new reference area had been constructed. Due to financial constraints, such as Proposition 2 ½, which limits the amount municipalities can raise property taxes each year, it placed an undue burden on hiring staff for the Sutton Room.

Because the library was part of the City of Peabody, the Trustees were at the mercy of the City Council, which denied the library a line item in the 1990 budget for Audubon preservation because that was seen as a

capital improvement. The available grants would not be sufficient for the preservation of the prints because of assessments made by the Northeast Document Conservation Center and the Fogg Museum at Harvard University, which put the total cost of conservation at over \$120,000. It was determined that selling approximately fifty of the prints would accomplish the goals set by the Trustees. Sotheby's New York proposed selling fifty

of the prints at a special auction sometime in 1990. With the addition of a reserve price, the estimated revenue from the sale was \$252,675, which would allow the Trustees to preserve the remaining Audubon prints and make necessary improvements to the Sutton Room.

The proposal to sell fifty Audubon prints was put forth to the Probate court. The Massachusetts Attorney General responded to the Trustees and the Court in August 1989, suggesting that the PIL partner with the Peabody Essex Museum to preserve the prints. This deaccession is unique because Trustee President Albert Cohen was one of the trustees who fought against the deaccession of the Audubon prints. At times, Lawrence O'Keefe, City Solicitor, had to attend Trustees meetings to provide



Peabody Essex Museum

CATHYPEM

The Long-Term Effects of One Institution's Missteps

guidance and also act as a mediator. Cohen, along with a few other Trustees, went so far as to work with the Attorney's General office to stop the sale.

Many Peabody residents were against the sale. In a *Peabody Times* article from October 28, 1987, a group of citizens led by John Wells, president of the Peabody Historical Commission, looked to raise \$50,000 to save and preserve the prints. There was a plan to go door-to-door and ask for donations from the local community. Local historians wrote op-eds in support of keeping the prints. Amy Ash, a staff writer for the *Peabody Times*, interviewed people on the street, and many were in favor of keeping the prints. Jan Bettencourt stated, "They were left to the people of this town. If they're thinking of selling them off, they should give the citizens a voice, too. I think it's a shame something like this may be lost forever."

The Peabody Institute and the state Attorney General agreed to a Consent Decree in October 1989. The decree stated that the Peabody Institute would enter into an agreement with Peter J. Fetchko, director of the Peabody Museum of Salem, now the Peabody Essex Museum, to preserve the prints and that the library would work to display the prints at the library. Judge Edward J. Rockett approved the decree.

In the years since the Consent Decree, the Peabody Institute has worked to preserve the Audubon prints and make them available. The Peabody Essex Museum conducted conservation work until it was no longer feasible to continue. The Peabody Institute sought out local conservators in the Boston area to continue the conservation of the Audubon prints. The prints are regularly rotated in a display case in the Sutton Room, which is now home to the archives and also public programs.

The Peabody Institute hired Nancy Barthelemy, the library's first archivist, in January of 2002. The lasting effects of the deaccession would become apparent when Nancy Barthelemy identified over 1,500 books that did not fit the archives collections policy or were in a condition that the Peabody Institute could not properly care for them, making them prime candidates for deaccessioning. Many of these volumes were on topics such as the study of antiquities, European history, and literature, written in Latin and French. In addition, after looking at the Sutton Room statistics and reference questions,

PEABODY INSTITUTE LIBRARY

BIRDS & BUBBLY
FRIDAY, MAY 9, 6:00-8:00PM

Join the Peabody Institute Library Foundation for an evening of Birds & Bubbly! The PIL owns one of only 119 remaining original copies of Audubon's 200 year old Birds of America prints, and works every year to conserve these prints for generations to come. Your donations make this continued effort possible.

Birds & Bubbly will feature selected framed prints that have been conserved and those that have yet to be conserved. This year's theme will be "Backyard Birds" and guests can enjoy a live bird demonstration from the Audubon Society's Drumlin Farm. Enjoy hors d'oeuvres, desserts, wine, beer, & bubbly (for those 21+) as we celebrate the PIL's history and support its future.

Tickets are \$50/person, and are available at all Peabody Library Locations or through Venmo @PILFoundation (Note: Birds & Bubbly)

Contact the Peabody Institute Library Foundation at peabodylibfoundation@gmail.com for more information about this event and sponsorship opportunities. Thank you for your support!

Fundraising event around the Audubon prints in 2025.

many of the books had not been consulted for over forty years. These books were placed into boxes and would be sold as lots by the library through an online vendor.

According to the Peabody Institute Library Trustees' minutes from May 6, 2002, the Massachusetts Attorney General compiled a list of books that could be deaccessioned; it is unclear how the Attorney General's list differs from that of the archivists. The Library Trustees worked with the Attorney's General office to ensure that the deaccession of books from the Sutton Room would not create any undue burden on the library as a whole. There was also discussion about any items that were to be deaccessioned and could be transferred to another institution, with a preference given to local Essex County museums, libraries, and archives.

The deaccessioning of archival materials was not discussed again until the June 2, 2008, Library Trustees' meeting. In her report, Director Martha Holden noted that the Peabody Institute's archivist outlined the reasoning for deaccessioning some materials that were not consistent with the collection's mission and function. Many of the books were purchased by the Peabody Institute rather than donations. The director asked the Library Trustees to review the report and consider the proposal at the September meeting. It was also recommended that a subcommittee be formed to examine the possibility in greater detail. Due to the issues with the attempted Audubon print deaccessioning in the 1980s, the Library Trustees were concerned about potential problems.

The Library Trustee minutes are not clear on whether a subcommittee was formed, but the issue was raised again at the September 8, 2008, board meeting. The library director spoke with the City Solicitor, who stated that the books could be sold, provided they were not a



1987

Community raises money to preserve the prints.

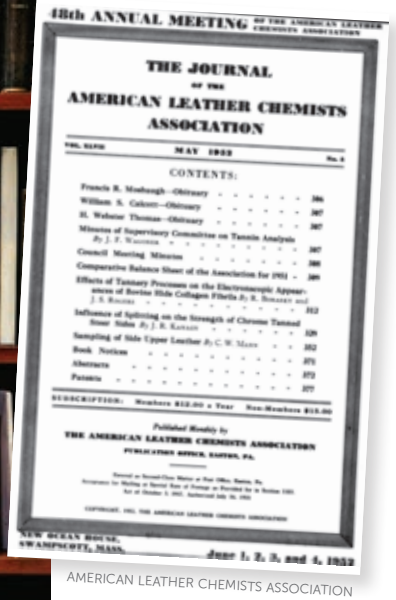
1989

PIL and the Peabody Museum agree to preserve the prints.

2002

PIL hires its first archivist.

INAKEI DEL OLMO/UNSPASH



The book and journal deaccession projects highlighted the complexity and necessity of this work.



2002
Book deaccessioning project begins.

donation from George Peabody or the Sutton family. In addition, the Trustees needed to work with the City of Peabody because the City Council had the final decision over any funds raised by the library. Although progress had been made towards the deaccessioning of books from the collection, again no action was taken by the Library Trustees until the June 1, 2009 Trustees meeting where the former director stated that she was looking into the Massachusetts laws that pertain to public libraries to see if there would be any issues about the proceeds from the sale of books, but the issue was not brought up again.

In 2013, I was hired as the second archivist of the PIL. One of my first goals was to deaccession the books. The first deaccession by the library occurred in 2014, when the Trustees approved the sale of one lot of books, which consisted of fourteen volumes, including a ten-volume set of *The Jewish Encyclopedia* and a two-volume set on Jerusalem from 1864. What makes this deaccession different is that the proceeds would be directed to the Friends of the Library and then allocated to the archivist for purchases. The one stipulation is that the Peabody Institute sell the books themselves, rather than finding a book dealer or auctioning them. The books were deaccessioned from PastPerfect, and the paperwork filed. Alibris was chosen for selling the books, as it cross-lists on other similar websites. This deaccession marked the first time the Trustees had approved the deaccessioning of Sutton Room materials since 1945.

In April 2015 the PIL completed a successful deaccession: a transfer to the George Peabody House and

Leatherworkers Museum. The PIL had 394 issues of *The Journal of the American Leather Chemists' Association* that had been considered found in collection. After reviewing the abandoned property requirements set forth by Massachusetts, it was determined that the journal was not a suitable fit for the collection and should be deaccessioned. In April of 2015, the Trustees voted to deaccession and transfer the journals. An inventory was taken, and a transfer agreement was created, which was signed by the library director and me. This straightforward transfer demonstrated to the Trustees that deaccessioning can have positive outcomes and benefit other institutions.

By January 2018, none of the books had sold on the web, so they were delisted from Alibris. In 2018, the library successfully deaccessioned all the books. Working with a new director and making a case to the Trustees that listing the books individually and waiting for them to sell was not an efficient approach, they agreed to allow book dealers to come and bid for all the books approved for deaccessioning. Out of three dealers contacted, two book dealers agreed to provide quotes. The winning bid was \$125,000, and that money would be put into a restricted fund that the archivist could use to preserve materials or purchase new acquisitions. The book deaccessioning project that began in 2002 was finally over, sixteen years later.

For deaccessioning to become a more natural part of the archive and the Library Trustees, several steps needed to be taken. The first was that the archive needed to have a separate collections management policy. I wrote a

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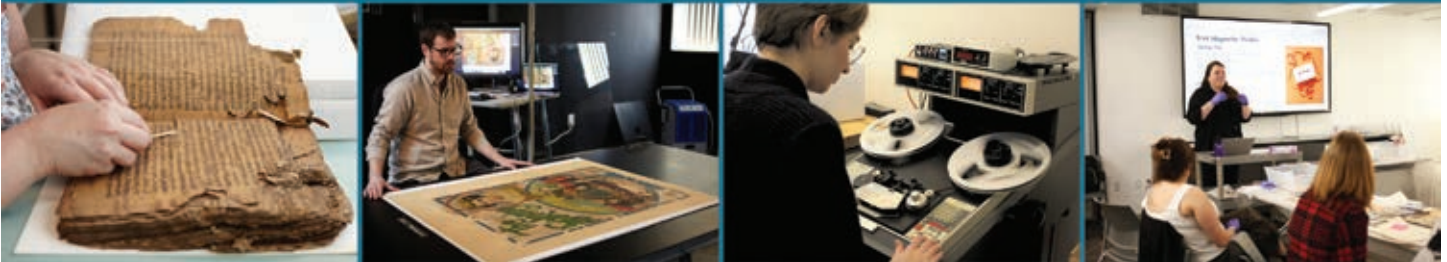
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AASLH would like to thank our Legacy Society members who have generously decided to include AASLH in their estate planning to help leave a lasting legacy for the history community. If you would like to know more about the AASLH Legacy Society or if you are interested in joining, please contact John Dichtl at dichtl@aaslh.org.

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Award Winner Spotlight

I'm Glad About It: The Legacy of Gospel Music in Louisville, 1958-1981

In AASLH's awards program, History in Progress (HIP) awards are special additional awards for Award of Excellence winners whose nominations are highly inspirational; exhibit exceptional scholarship; and/or are exceedingly entrepreneurial in terms of funding, partnerships, or collaborations, creative problem solving, or unusual project design and inclusiveness. HIP awards are granted at the discretion of the Awards Committee to 5 percent or fewer of that year's total winners, with a typical year having two or three HIP winners. Two winners earned HIP honors in 2025, both spotlighting Black history and culture.

I'm Glad About It: The Legacy of Gospel Music in Louisville, 1958-1981 from the

Louisville Story Program (LSP) preserved the legacy of Black gospel music in Louisville through deep community engagement and cultural reclamation of recordings and photos. The Louisville Story Program partners with local communities who are misrepresented or underrepresented in public discourse to preserve precious history and to document their stories in their own words and images. In this work, LSP aimed to make a project not only about the Louisville gospel community, but with and for them, and for the local gospel community to benefit as much as possible from the project. Through tireless archival and public research, oral histories, digitization, and the creation of a book and recording collection,

I'm Glad About It restores Louisville's rich gospel history to the public consciousness and to the people who lived it.

At the beginning of the project, it quickly became evident that the 1950s through the 1970s was the era in which Louisville's gospel music community was at its peak, with the largest number of gospel artists and musicians, largest audiences, largest quantity and frequency of gospel programs, and the greatest centrality of gospel music to Black life in Louisville. Yet most of the recorded output of the Louisville gospel music community in Louisville during that time was extremely difficult to find and almost



DANNY WARREN/LOUISVILLE STORY PROGRAM

CHRIS BROWN



The Traveling Echoes gospel group



LOUISVILLE STORY PROGRAM



A sampling of releases by Louisville gospel artists.



none of it had been digitized and made publicly available. Many of the recordings created by Louisville artists during this era were no longer in the possession of anyone in the local gospel community.

Over three years, the Louisville Story Program located, digitized, and made publicly available 1,000 rare recordings by 125 Louisville artists and/or record labels between 1958 and 1981, restoring them both to the community and to the historic record. The recordings were compiled into a four-CD box set, a double LP record, and a free digital archive of 1,000 songs and photographs. LSP worked closely with elders in the Louisville gospel community who knew the history and who had spent their lives helping to build and sustain this rich gospel legacy. Dozens of members of Louisville's Black gospel music community wrote a 208-page book that documents the history of the communities that produced this extraordinary music.

A significant part of this project was outreach and public awareness, bringing the city's rich gospel heritage to light for contemporary audiences and honoring the contributions of past history-making artists. To celebrate the release of the box set, digital archive, and YouTube library of archival videos, more than 1,200 people attended *I'm Glad About It: A Celebration of Louisville's Gospel Music Heritage* at the Brown Theatre on

September 28, 2024. Well over half of the audience consisted of members of the Louisville gospel community, demonstrating a strong response from the community LSP was centering and honoring. The celebration featured performances by six gospel quartets, two large gospel choirs, a montage of artists who have passed on, and multimedia presentations on elements of Louisville's gospel music history between sets. The project inspired other events as well, including hymn singing concerts at First Congregational Methodist Church and a presentation at the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Looking ahead, LSP is considering collaborating on a museum exhibit and a documentary film focused on the city's gospel history.

LSP also put cultural equity at the forefront of this project. Gospel artists in the past had not always been treated fairly by record companies, licensing and royalty information had been lost, and much of the historic record of this culture had been removed from the community itself. Members of the local gospel community earned over \$30,000 from the project through licensing payments, artist acknowledgment payments, and

compensation acknowledging significant outreach efforts by a few key organizers. In addition to receiving several free copies of *I'm Glad About It*, contributors also have the option to work as distributors, purchasing half-price wholesale copies and selling them at a profit to people in the local Black gospel community, gaining wider distribution and cementing the project as built on community networks and relationships.

I'm Glad About It: The Legacy of Gospel Music in Louisville, 1958-1981 is a model for community engagement projects that combine the lived experience and memory of community members with the work of public historians. By helping restore community voices and records to their rightful place in city memory, LSP co-created a meaningful project that shares hidden history without being extractive, reasserts the voices of Louisvillians who lived history, and truly reflects LSP's vision that one day all communities in Louisville will have equal opportunity and resources to document their culture and history as a pathway to healing and belonging. ●



Exhibit Hall at AASLH's 2025 conference.

Cincinnati Conference a Success

The 2025 AASLH Annual Conference in partnership with the Ohio Local History Alliance was held September 10-13 in Cincinnati, and ended up being our fourth largest meeting of all time with 1,063 registrants! Attendees enjoyed four days of workshops, tours, sessions, and networking. With events at the Cincinnati Museum Center and National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and tours exploring the city's immigration and brewing history, the conference spotlighted the local hospitality and culture that makes this city unique and historic.

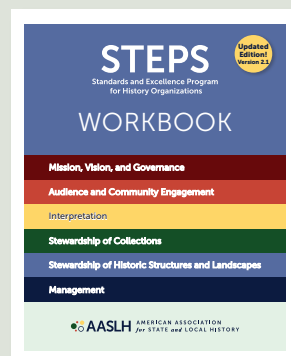
The 2026 conference will be held in Providence, Rhode

Island, in partnership with the National Council on Public History. Session proposals are due **December 5**, so get yours in today! Read more at aaslh.org/annualconference/2026-annual-conference.

STEPS Resolutions for 2026

If you're already thinking about your site's visitation, revenue, and engagement goals for 2026, consider enrolling in AASLH's STEPS program to help you get there. The

Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (STEPS) is a self-study, self-paced assessment program designed specifically for small- to mid-sized history organizations, including volunteer-run institutions. Through a workbook, online resources, and an online community, organizations enrolled in STEPS review their policies and practices and benchmark themselves against national museum standards. Trusted since 2009 to help smaller sites assess needs, prioritize projects, educate board members, and chart an achievable path forward, STEPS can help your site get back on track or organized for the first time. Learn more at aaslh.org/professional-development/steps.



Small Museums Summit

November 12-13 saw the latest AASLH virtual summit with "Small Museums, Important Collections" presented by our Small Museum Affinity Community. Two afternoons of presentations and conversations focused on the particular collections needs of sites with limited staff and budgets, and over 200 attendees enjoyed expanded networking time to meet with others around the country to brainstorm, troubleshoot, and plan. Two plenary sessions focused on collections projects that won AASLH Leadership in History Awards and recovering from weather disasters at historic sites. Stay tuned for more virtual summits in 2026!

Virtual Summit
Nov. 12-13, 2025

Small
Museums,
Important
Collections



History Communication Workshop

Join us December 11 for a half-day workshop dedicated to strengthening history communication with your community. Whether you need to write fundraising letters, make advocacy calls, speak with the media, or simply update your website, this workshop

is for you. Drawing on research from AASLH's Reframing History project, this event will help you communicate with public audiences more effectively and build a wider understanding of the value of history and history organizations. During this workshop, participants will learn about recent research findings regarding how Americans think about history and its value to society. We'll discuss how strategic framing choices can help history practitioners "communicate for impact," sharing their message more effectively and fostering greater understanding. We'll practice crafting effective messages about history for public audiences. Attendees will leave feeling more confident communicating with the public about the work their institution does and its value to their communities. Learn more and register by December 10 at learn.aaslh.org.

National Survey of History Practitioners

Fielded in spring 2025, AASLH's National Survey of History Practitioners gathered data from more than 3,700 history practitioners across the United States, asking a range of questions about who works in public history, how they are paid, and how they feel about their work. With this rich dataset, AASLH will be producing a series of reports and programs about issues and challenges in the public history workforce in early 2026.

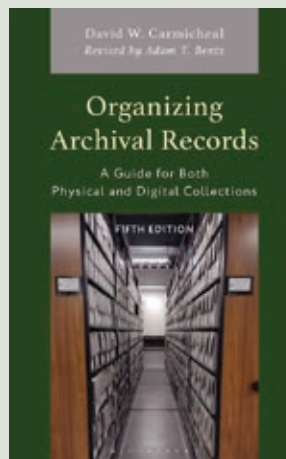
We hope the findings will be used widely to support wide-ranging conversations about the nature of public history work, the challenges public history practitioners face, and how we might take action to create a stronger, more inclusive, more sustainable field.

New Bloomsbury Editor

In September, Charles Harmon, our long-time editor with Bloomsbury (and before that, Rowman & Littlefield) retired from the field. Our new editor who will work with the AASLH editorial board on acquiring and managing publications for our book series is Debbie Gershenowitz. Debbie was formerly an executive editor at the University of North Carolina Press and has also worked in acquisitions at NYU Press, Palgrave Macmillan, and Charles Scribner's Sons. She is also a historian, and we are thrilled to have her join our editorial team to produce practical and meaningful texts for the public history field.

Organizing Archival Records

Our first new book of 2026 will be a fifth edition of *Organizing Archival Records*, updated and revised by Adam T. Bentz. For thirty years, the classic volume by David Carmichael equipped non-professional archivists to tackle the challenging task of arranging and describing archival materials. The latest edition preserves the practical, easy-to-follow, step-by-



step approach of earlier editions while updating its content to reflect current archival practices and growing concerns over social justice, while offering solutions for common collection problems. This book will publish in January, and pre-orders are available on the Bloomsbury website.

Applications Open for HLI 2026

Since 1959, the History Leadership Institute (HLI) has helped history professionals develop the skills, insights, and connections they need to lead with purpose and impact. Through immersive learning experiences and a trusted national network, HLI equips leaders to strengthen their organizations and the broader history community. Led by Andrea Jones, a nationally recognized museum educator and leadership facilitator, the HLI Seminar offers a transformational experience designed to help you lead more effectively—within your insti-



tution and across the field. HLI Fellows explore the biggest questions and challenges shaping our field, including human-centered work culture, inclusive practices, facilitating change, centering values, and much more.

The next HLI cohort will meet in-person June 1–12 in Minneapolis, with virtual meetings leading up to this component. Applications are due **December 31, 2025**, and there are several full scholarships available. Learn more at aaslh.org/professional-development/history-leadership.

Winter Courses Now Available

Instructor-led courses starting in January are now open for registration. These courses are between four to eight weeks long and offer students a chance to engage deeply with subject material over an extended period of time. With accessible readings and assignments, regular video chats with faculty and other students, and access to online forums, these courses combine the flexibility of self-paced work with the power of discussion with peers from around the country.

Beginning **January 12** are Introduction to Financial Management, Collections Management 100, Basics of Archives, Developing Exhibitions, Project Management for History Professionals, and Museum Education and Outreach. Learn more and register at learn.aaslh.org.



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