

History on the Edge of Nowhere Working Group Case Statements: NCPH 2015

Shae Adams: W.K. Gordon Center for Industrial History of Texas

The W.K. Gordon Center for Industrial History of Texas interprets the history of Thurber, a company town owned by the Texas and Pacific Coal Company from 1888 until the closing of the town in 1935. Those who lived in Thurber mainly worked in the company coal mines or at the brick plant. The coal powered the trains on the expanding railroad lines while Thurber brick paved its way across the nation as far as Bisbee, Arizona. At its height, Thurber operated as the largest town between Fort Worth and El Paso with an estimated population of 10,000 people representing 17 different nationalities. Today, the town contains two restaurants, a cemetery, the remnants of an electrical plant smokestack, and the museum with a population of 5. A generous endowment through Tarleton State University by Mrs. W.K. Gordon constructed the building and ensures our day-to-day operations. With the nearest population center 30 miles away, we get most of our visitors from curious travelers on Interstate 20 that runs in front of the museum. On average, we see about 3,000 visitors a year.

Unsurprisingly, we see the majority of our visitors during our monthly programs. One Sunday a month we invite a speaker from a Texas industry to the museum for a two-hour program. Past programs have included wine tastings, Blue Bell Ice Cream tastings, book signings and soap making demonstrations. In addition, each month we host a Night Out at the Opera House event where we screen a movie from the 1920s or 1930s in our theater modeled after Thurber's own Opera House. Both of these events are free to the public. Both these events are relatively popular with a strong base of repeat visitors, mostly locals from small communities 15-20 minutes from the museum.

However, we have difficulty attracting new visitors to these programs. In order to broaden our visitor base, particularly among Tarleton college students, we have begun experimenting with new programs targeting those groups. For instance, last October we held a flashlight tour of the museum. We marketed the event with the help of campus sororities and fraternities and provided transportation for students. This has been one of our most popular events with 54 visitors, none of whom had previously visited the museum. We hope to continue similar programming, with at least one college event each semester.

We have attempted to increase awareness of the museum through a partnership with the Texas Historical Commission's Texas Heritage Trails Program. As a member of the Texas Forts Trail Region, we participate in their "Passport" program that encourages visitors to tour all the historic sites on the trail for a chance to win prizes in a yearly raffle. We have recently begun an informal tracking of our visitors through our guestbook and docent conversations and have found that the passport draws a significant amount of visitors to our museum. The program also assists us in advertising by adding our events to the region calendar, although we have yet to see an increase in event attendees from this outlet.

Our survey of why visitors stop at the Center indicates that the majority just happens to be driving by and decide to stop out of curiosity or were recommended to visit by family or friends. Many express surprise at the quality of our exhibits and historical information, confiding that they “never thought it would be so nice.”

While we do have a strong social media presence, running Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram accounts, few visitors have noted that social media brought them to the museum. However, social media, especially Facebook, has been invaluable in spreading the word about our special events. Our event related posts tend to have a high level of engagement online. Although we do not see increased day-to-day foot traffic from social media, it has allowed us to engage with a different audience. Those who engage the most on social media often have direct family ties to Thurber, are more familiar with the history of the town, or have a special interest in brick or coal industries. Through social media, we were able to draw the attention of the International Brick Collectors Association, which is now contemplating holding their 2017 annual meeting at our facility.

As we look to the future, we hope to increase local awareness of the W.K. Gordon Center through community outreach initiatives that have been ignored in the past. Last December we held two special holiday programs for a local Foster’s Home children, with successful (if chaotic) results. In addition, due to severe budget cuts to our local school districts, we decided to offer free field trips to nearby schools this year. We have been in conversation with nearby high schools to potentially begin a Junior Historians Chapter at the museum. This chapter would combine students from four or five high schools giving those interested in history a chance to participate in Texas History Day competitions and create locally based history projects. At this time, the schools do not have the resources or the number of students necessary for a chapter individually. Given this new direction, my question for similar museums is this: How do you start meaningful and sustainable community outreach programs when nearby communities are only slightly aware of your existence? Can you become an integral part of the community when your communities could be as much as 45 minutes away from your geographical location?

Kelly Herold: Buffalo County Historical Society

The Buffalo County Historical Society (BCHS) is located in the quaint city of Alma, Wisconsin, along the mighty Mississippi River. The city itself has a population of approximately 800 while the entire county’s population reaches only 13,000. Having been in existence for nearly 35 years, the BCHS’ activities had become rather stagnant over time. This resulted in two main public programs being held each year, a spring annual meeting with speaker and a fall Backroads Tour. Both of these events would bring 35-75 people, but mostly the same residents and members each time.

Throughout the year, the BCHS office handles genealogists and their requests while serving as a research room for those who are researching genealogy and local history. The visitor count for the office reaches approximately 500-600 total each year. While the

communities in the area served by the BCHS are small and rural, the people who have connections to the area feel very connected to their hometowns and often are happy to return to research family or memorable events. The problem is that they still do not live close enough to take part in the programs that are being offered.

In 2004, we began an event that based loosely on the Chautauqua experience held in Northern Wisconsin with 3-4 speakers, a lunch, even music in a one-day experience. This was attended by as many as 100, but dwindled after a couple of years with bad weather. To reach that level of attendance for one event, we expanded our press release area to the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, nearly 100 miles distant, and included the cities of Winona, MN (28,000), La Crosse, WI (51,000), Eau Claire, WI (65,000), and Rochester, MN (105,000). We also were able to get some time on a local radio show for the event. While these methods helped us out, they had diminishing returns over time.

The ways we have found that have worked more recently involve a two-fold approach. First, we have begun to build an online presence outside of our regular website. This has involved posting regularly on Facebook (or as regularly as a staff of 1.4 FTEs can). Since we began to do this, we have learned that photos and stories from our collections work the best while sharing links from other sites or posting with no imagery results in little engagement with our audience. One of the concerns for this increase in social media is the return on investment from such activities. Unfortunately, we have seen little in the way of converting online followers into paying members or monetary donors, but we have started to see the increase in our attendance. Our 2014 Backroads Tour sold more tour booklets than ever in its 29 years and had an attendance of over 100 people all trying to fit into a one room schoolhouse.

The second part of our new approach has been to increase the frequency and quality of public programming. For 2015, there are already 14 scheduled events with corporate sponsorship lined up for the Heritage Speakers Series, which is being unveiled to the public before the end of January 2015. The planning for this series has taken on a life of its own, but we are already hearing feedback from stakeholders, donors, and others we have approached with the idea and how they feel it can increase our visibility and visitor count.

An interesting observation from my past 13 years at the BCHS is that local “amateur” speakers have more than doubled the attendance at events compared to bringing in a professor or other “professional” speaker. This result is sometimes explained by family members and friends of the speaker, but this is exactly why we have focused much more on such speakers for any events we do host. The use of local speakers has also allowed us to find corporate funding more readily available as the rural communities will often allow us to ask for funding from business leaders who have at least a friendly knowledge of the speakers being used. In addition, the local speakers are able to get their stories told in a manner that their own families are often not able to convince them to do, connecting their generation with their children and grandchildren much more closely.

Another new attempt to gather support on the digital front has been our decision to continue to record speakers, with their permission, but now to upload the programs to YouTube instead of attempting to sell the videos. Due to low sales volume of programming, this decision was made to receive the most impact from each of our programs. Well the number of views for each program are not extraordinary, they have brought our programs into the homes of hundreds more people than previously possible. At the same time, the YouTube channel redirects visitors to our website for more information about our purpose.

Al Hester: South Carolina State Park Service

While the South Carolina State Park Service serves more than seven million visitors a year, many of the historic sites it manages are isolated and infrequently visited. In particular, three plantation historic sites are located far from urban centers, interstate highways, or attractions such as the beach, Charleston, and the mountains. As a result, their annual visitation is consistently the lowest in the State Park system. For example, in 2013, only about 3,200 people attended tours, events or education programs at Redcliffe Plantation State Historic Site.[1] Visitation figures were similar at Rose Hill and Hampton Plantations. Both geographically and demographically, these three sites are definitely “on the edge of nowhere.” But they are hardly unique: a 1990 study found this typical pattern at historic house museums across the country, noting that more than half had visitation of less than 5,000 people per year.[2]

So it turns out, there are smart and competent people all over the country at similar historic sites, and yet the national pattern of low visitation remains the same for many. Questions like these have caused some to wonder whether we just have too many historic house museums. I still remain convinced that these sites are important—and that the quality, relevance and meaning of the visitor experience are what give our sites value. But the question remains, how can we engage people in this visitor experience if we can’t get more people to the museum? Once answer may lie in turning our focus towards adjacent rural communities before concentrating on the heritage tourism model of attracting travelers.[3]

Plantation museums can have a powerful community impact in ways that are intrinsic to this type of historic site. They can serve as places of reconciliation, or at least a point of contact, for descendant communities. At these places where African Americans were once enslaved by white planters and their families, descendants from both groups are increasingly gathering together to discover their shared histories in an atmosphere that acknowledges both the harsh truth of past oppression and the shared humanity of the people involved. The role of the museum isn’t necessarily to right past wrongs, but to provide a place where reflections about the wrongs can take place. The staff at Redcliffe Plantation successfully hosted a gathering of this type, and concluded that “it was overwhelmingly positive and powerful.”[4] Of course, this kind of museum relevance doesn’t have to be limited to plantations—similar descendant community gatherings can

take place at sites of labor conflict, battlefields, internment camps, and other places where two groups once found each other in opposition.

But working with descendant communities can go beyond hosting gatherings, which really are just starting points. At Hampton Plantation, a community archaeology project sought to involve descendants in archaeological excavations, creating opportunities for sharing knowledge between the local and professional communities at the site.[5] While the results were very positive, community involvement was limited, and we learned that this kind of sharing will require years of building trust between descendants and the historic site.

Future progress will involve not only building trust, but also may require the rethinking of the purposes of the museum itself. In the case of plantations, which formerly were residences for enslaved, and later, free workers, the transition from home to museum often resulted in shutting off access by traditionally associated communities. Of course, historic sites are open to all, but often in passive and sterile ways, and then usually after an entrance fee has been charged. When these sites were homeplaces, residents had a different type of access. At places like Hampton Plantation, descendants of former slaves fished, hunted, collected firewood, gathered medicinal plants, and buried their dead on the property for generations. Few members of that community still come to the property, especially when the best thing we can offer is a historic house tour. But the site remains a touchstone for the community. Part of ensuring that a plantation site like Hampton remains relevant lies in finding ways to bring the descendant community back, on their terms. While the mission of the museum precludes uses that are damaging to the buildings, landscapes and collections, there ought to be ways to accommodate the needs of the local community. For example, at Hampton, issues such as declining water quality, encroaching development, a decrease of forest-related employment, and loss of access to agricultural land may be of more immediate importance to the neighboring descendant community than the distant history of the American Revolution. But these contemporary issues still have a history that is closely tied to that of the historic site—so programming related to these topics could serve both the museum mission and local interests.

Similarly, the universal topics of food and foodways might bring together descendants and outside visitors at the same time. Hampton was a rice plantation, but commercial rice production ceased around 1915. Subsistence rice cultivation continued until the 1960s, and at one time many locals maintained small rice patches that sustained their families. Today, patch rice cultivation has completely disappeared, but one food historian has noted that if rice is to come back to the Lowcountry successfully, it will be as a garden vegetable grown in small patches.[6] Sites like Hampton can connect the history of a lost crop with contemporary interest in the “local food movement” possibly through programming and demonstrations, in a manner similar to that described in a recent issue of *The Public Historian*. [7] Approaches such as these could give the general public a chance to meet and talk with descendants about topics of shared interest, possibly enriching the experience of both groups. In the process, the “edge of nowhere” might still be physically distant from the rest of the world, but hopefully it will have

become much more meaningful and relevant, and if we're lucky, a few new visitors will come to value another museum or historic site.

[1] Redcliffe Plantation General Management Plan, 2014, copy on file at Redcliffe Plantation State Historic Site, Beech Island, SC.

[2] "The Great Historic House Museum Debate," The Boston Globe, 10 August 2014, accessed on 1/9/2015 at <http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2014/08/09/the-great-historic-house-museum-debate/jzFwE9tvJdHD CXehIWqK4O/story.html>. See also Sherry Butcher-Youghans, *Historic House Museums*, p. 6.

[3] "The Kykuit II Summit: The Sustainability of Historic Sites," *History News* (Autumn 2007): p. 21.

[4] Elizabeth Laney, personal communication with Al Hester, 2 August 2012. A program titled "Redcliffe Roots Weekend," was attended by 93 total descendants from 7 different main family groups, in August 2012. "Redcliffe Roots Weekend Commemorates a Shared Legacy," *Aiken Standard*, 3 August 2012, accessed on 1/9/15 at <http://www.aikenstandard.com/article/20120803/AIK0403/120809914>.

[5] <https://palmettotruster.org/news/item/377-2014-historic-preservation-awards-winners>, accessed on 1/12/15.

[6] David Shields, online comment on 29 August 2014 at <https://www.facebook.com/david.s.shields>

[7] Michelle Moon and Cathy Stanton, "The First Course: A Case for Locating Public History within the 'Food Movement,'" *The Public Historian*, Vol. 36, no. 3 (August 2014): pp. 109-129. Both Rose Hill and Redcliffe Plantations have found that interpretive heirloom gardens draw both visitors and volunteers.

Courtney Hobson: Darnall's Chance House Museum

Before continuing with my case statement, I must preface this by stating that I am no longer a part-time employee of Darnall's Chance House Museum as of November 2014. I am working full-time as a Program Assistant for the Maryland Humanities Council. However, I still work periodically for the museum, particularly for museum events.



“Lettice Lee Wardrop Thomson Sim” painted by John Wollaston in 1753. On loan from the Virginia Historical Society

Darnall’s Chance House Museum is a mid-18th century house museum that interprets the history of 18th century Prince George’s County, Maryland, particularly through the eyes of Lettice Lee, who resided in the house from her marriage to Scottish merchant, James Wardrop, in 1747 until her death in 1776.

The house is interpreted in accordance to the 1760 inventory of James Wardrop’s estate and still sits on much of the acreage that Mr. Wardrop purchased (20 out of 21 acres). The backyard features an underground brick burial vault, one of only two in the state of Maryland. Buried within the vault is Lettice Lee and eight family members. Lettice is the particular focus of this museum because of the interesting life she led; a member of the Maryland branch of the Lee family, Lettice was married three times (twice to Scottish immigrants). During her second widowhood, Lettice earned an income by means of a distillery. In addition to the story of Lettice, Darnall’s Chance shares the story of the enslaved women who worked there, particular the women of the Bentley family, in which 3 generations petitioned their owners for their freedom.

Darnall’s Chance is located in the historic town of Upper Marlboro, established in 1706. Located along the Patuxent River, Upper Marlboro has served as the county seat of Prince George’s County since 1721. Throughout the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth century, Upper Marlboro was a booming port town due to the cultivation of tobacco by nearby farmers. However, as that trade dwindled, so did the town’s population. What once was a community of over 20,000 (a large portion of which was African American, free and enslaved) has decreased to 631. The largest industry that currently exists in Upper Marlboro is the county government by way of the administration building, the courthouse, and the various law offices and bail bondsmen.

Despite our small-town location, Darnall’s Chance, by virtue of being a part of the Prince George’s County Department of Parks and Recreation (which is itself a part of the Maryland-National Capitol Park and Planning Commission), serves the entire county, which is the second-most populous in the state. However, we average only 3,000-4,000

visitors a year. Two of our sister sites – Surratt’s House Museum (the tavern of Lincoln co-conspirator, Mary Surratt) and Riversdale House Museum (the home of George and Rosalie Calvert, members of the first family of Maryland) – attracts vastly larger numbers (Admittedly, perhaps this is by virtue of the relatively famous occupants of these homes).



Exterior of Darnall’s Chance House Museum

The majority of our visitors come to our annual programming, the most popular of which is the Gingerbread House Show and Contest. For this particular event, we often see frequent visitors, however it does attract an abundance of new visitors, most of whom have never heard of the museum prior to coming for the show. The hope is that with many of our once-a-year events, many of our new visitors will come back for tours and other events. Unfortunately, this has not proven to be sufficient.

In my last few months of employment at Darnall’s Chance, the staff sought to increase visitor traffic through new programming. Advertising methods, like social media and signage, are not a viable option as all social media for the events is conducted out of office through a Public Affairs office that promotes events for the entire department and town ordinances only permit a certain amount of signs. This leaves a bit inaccessible unless a visitor is specifically looking for what we have to offer or just happens upon the site.

It has yet to be seen whether these new events (like a Burns’ Night Supper to tap into the house’s Scottish heritage or a History of Chocolate lecture/tasting) will attract a new audience. Another idea that is currently in development is a deeper relationship with the fairly new town historical committee. The committee is struggling to connect to town residents. A partnership with Darnall’s Chance may bring greater visibility for the committee and a greater awareness throughout the town of not only the efforts of the committee, but the museum itself. It is the hope of the museum that by building these community relationships, Darnall’s Chance will become the cultural center of its little chunk of nowhere.



Photo courtesy of the Town of Upper Marlboro website

Glenn Johnston: Historical Society of Baltimore County

During the economic downturn of 2008-2010, I was president of the Historical Society of Baltimore County (HSBC). The board and I were faced with the imminent demise of our institution as we watched the value of our invested funds drop 40% in a 60-day period. Our Society, having been dependent on grants for five years prior, had only six months operating revenue remaining. Our only hope was to seriously cut expenses at the same time we worked to increase funding. Our plan for cutting expenses included reducing our employee count by 75% and by cutting our business hours 80%. Hampered in our ability to raise revenues through an increase in membership fees, we were left to depend on government grants for the time being. The problem was that those grants were, rightfully so, tied directly to an organization's impact on the community as measured by visitor counts. Our conundrum was that our efforts to reduce expenses—cutting staff and hours--seemed to fly directly in the face of expanding our programs and increasing headcount.

Located in an out-of-the-way location a half-hour north of Baltimore, buried in the shadows thrown by the mighty public history venues of Washington, D.C., with a staff of seven volunteers and one part-time administrator working at a venue open only four hours per week, our future seemed dim at best. We might as well have been located on the edge of nowhere. Our strategy for survival depended on our ability to obtain grants, and this, in turn, depended on increasing our visitor headcount. We pursued our strategy using three tactics: 1) Maneuvering ourselves into a leadership position in the celebration of Baltimore County's 350th anniversary in 2009; 2) Investing in a pop-up tent as well as the equipment and signage necessary to bringing our county history on the road, and 3) dramatically expanding our web presence.

By taking a leadership position in the arrangement of the county's 350th celebration, our board members were given the opportunity to travel and address government committees and other public history venues at the local, state, and federal levels. We met with key members of the state legislature as well as offices of the state executive branch. We never asked for direct funding for our institution. Instead, we asked for money to fund the historical education of their constituents in its 350th year. Within a year, we were well known as THE public history voice for Baltimore County. We negotiated with the county

to fund a commemorative book written and published by the Society the proceeds of which would go to the Society. In addition, the county was willing to charge the Society minimal fees for the use of county facilities in return for our development of educational programming associated with the 350th. Since the Society was located in an old county alms house, this drastically reduced the expenses associated with power and heat.

Taking our Society on the road and engaging with the public at local festivals and fairs paid off handsomely. It also helped that the Maryland State Fair had been a Baltimore County event for as long as anyone could remember. We met people who wanted to become members and volunteer at the society. Everyone seemed to have a historical question they had wanted to ask for years; we were pleased to help them. Along the way they learned that just 20-minutes away was a place they could come to research family and local history. Many folks were happy to know that they could contribute to us through the United Way or could just make a small donation using PayPal. Of greatest importance was the fact that every person who stopped by the tent was a visitor to the Society. Our “headcount” of visitors with whom we had face-to-face contact increased from roughly 400 in 2008 to over 3,000 in 2009. For an investment of approximately \$2800 in tentage, folding tables, and signs, the Society was able to increase its headcount by 750% in one year. Our membership remained flat at a time it should have decreased through the new members we gained “on the road.”

Finally, we invested time, effort, and a modest amount of money into our website. We redesigned our site to provide more research information than we had before. Our web host provided user data for our analysis that allowed to see the total number of visitors, returning visitors, dwell time per page view, as well as their navigation path through our website. By reinforcing areas that seemed to be of great interest to our viewers and by making our website our main way for members and visitors to interact with our Society, we were able dramatically increase usage. Each of those digital visitors went into our annual headcount as well.

In our first year of executing our strategy, we were able to cut our expenses by 68%, increase visitor headcount twentyfold, and bring in enough revenue—largely through grants—to allow us to run in the black for the first time in a decade. None of this would have occurred if we had focused solely on our building. It was “exporting” our Society to the streets, or through the Web, that allowed us to achieve our goals.

Adam Long: The Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Educational Center

The Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Educational Center, in rural Piggott, AR, preserves the home of Paul and Mary Pfeiffer, the parents of Ernest Hemingway’s second wife Pauline. The Pfeiffers transformed their barn into a writing studio for Ernest, and it was in this unlikely spot that Ernest wrote portions of *A Farewell to Arms*, as well as several short stories. Both the family home and the barn-studio have been restored to their 1930s condition, and the exhibits interpret the story of the Pfeiffer family and their relationship to Hemingway, focusing among other things on the family’s significant

financial patronage of Hemingway. The museum is owned and operated by Arkansas State University, which is located 50 miles away in Jonesboro, AR. Last year, the museum served roughly 4500 visitors.

The museum has many strengths. Writers and Hemingway fans come from around the world to visit Ernest's studio. Despite such appeal among certain affinity groups, the museum's location presents certain obstacles to the average visitor. Piggott is a small town with a population of under 4000, located away from major highways. It is about 30 miles to US Highway 67, the major highway between Little Rock and St. Louis, and about 50 miles to Interstate 55, the major highway between St. Louis and New Orleans. The nearest population center is Jonesboro, about 50 miles away, which has a metropolitan area of just over 100,000. The nearest city (and major airport) is Memphis, a two-and-a-half hour drive. Piggott itself offers limited lodging. The local bed and breakfast has 8 rooms and the local motel has 3-4 rooms (though they are in the middle of renovating additional rooms). There are also a few cabins available to rent. Fortunately, Piggott has several good dining and shopping options.

In attempting to overcome the challenges coming from our rural location, we have focused more on programming than on external issues. We offer writers' retreats two-three times a year. These prove to be popular events. Many writers find value in working in the studio of a great American writer, and the university is committed to providing well-trained writers and academics to serve as mentors for these retreats. These events have allowed us to attract participants (12-15 per retreat) from as far away as New York, California, and Chicago. This has been great for the museum, especially in terms of visibility within the writing community. Though these events are successful, we find that if we do more than two a year, the participation is diluted and the quality diminishes. This past year, we were able to supplement these retreats with two new programs. In May, we offered an educational trip to Cuba sponsored by our membership program. We took 34 travelers from nine states on this trip. In September, we offered a reading retreat targeted a more general audience than the writers' retreat. We invited participants to read three books in advance of the retreat, and then to come to the museum for a weekend of activities and discussion about the books. This culminated in a Lost Generation costume dinner open to the public. We had 20 participants for the whole weekend and 75 for the dinner. Though most of these participants were locals, we were able to attract several from elsewhere in Arkansas, two from Houston, and one from Ontario. In addition to these big programs, we offer readings, after school programs for school children, and art and essay contests for students. Though these educational programs are successful, they tend to attract mostly repeat participation among a small group of fairly local participants. The major events are much more successful at bringing in new visitors.

One other very useful outreach tool has been our participation in local historic preservation. Arkansas State University's Heritage Sites program has taken on the restoration of several important sites in the Delta region of Arkansas. Hemingway-Pfeiffer was the first of these projects. ASU has also restored the headquarters of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (an early agricultural union with integrated membership as early as the 1930s) and the Lakeport Plantation (home of a branch of the family of

Vice President Richard Mentor Johnson, and the only antebellum plantation remaining on the river in Arkansas). Most recently, ASU completed restoration of the Dyess Colony: The Boyhood Home of Johnny Cash. In addition to these projects, ASU has partnered with other state universities to restore the Rohwer Japanese-American Internment Camp, which interred Japanese Americans during World War II. It's most notable internee was George Takei (Star Trek's Mr. Sulu), who has become a spokesman for the project. These five sites are connected by two scenic byways, and we have promoted these sites together. This has had several positive effects. First, the sites attract various affinity groups, and after visiting one site visitors often visit the others. Thus, a Johnny Cash fan might not normally visit the Hemingway studio, but after visiting and enjoying Dyess, they are more likely to do so. Second, this series of high-profile restorations has attracted much media attention. Finally, the communities of the Arkansas Delta have begun to embrace these projects and take pride in them.

At this point, the museum is not doing much promotion using social media. We do some basic Facebooking, but we've only been paying close attention to this aspect of promotion for the past few months, so we are in the very early stages of evaluating this effort. One other topic I would like to discuss is how other historic sites have been able to overcome the negative stereotypes of being rural. In addition to being rural, Piggott is also in the South, specifically in Arkansas, both locations with negative stereotypical associations. Not only do we have to combat our actual geographic location, we also have to combat the stereotypes associated with this location. I would be interested to hear how other sites are dealing with similar prejudices.

Jay Price: Wichita State University

While serving on the board of the Kansas Humanities Council, it became apparent that grants and programs have tended to be concentrated in certain parts of the state over others, in spite of efforts to have a good coverage across Kansas. Of particular concern were areas in western Kansas, sparsely populated and overwhelmingly rural. Some communities were leaders in obtaining grants, hosting innovative programs, and being active in local history and humanities efforts. Others, however, were not.

There were numerous issues. Some were demographic, including areas with substantial shifts in ethnic and cultural composition whose role in cultural institutions was limited. One challenge for organizations such as humanities councils has been to broaden diversity on board and staff positions. This is easier said than done given that populations from Latino and Asian groups, for example, may not always be connected to or work within the existing network of libraries and museums, or may rely on a handful of community leaders who are already stretched thin to meet the needs of other obligations. Moreover, many rural and Great Plains local museums and libraries have come to depend on an aging, sometimes part-time or volunteer-based leadership who have had limited experience with grant opportunities. The need for further education on writing grants, for example, has grown in importance. Among the avenues to consider are humanities councils offering workshops on grant writing, having organizations team

up to submit grants, or working with regional Public History programs to facilitate fundraising, grant activities, and other applications.

Moreover, leadership training programs, such as the Kansas Leadership Center, serve roles as well to help communities transition towards new opportunities, handle long-term changes, and include new, diverse voices in leadership roles. If they are to train the next generation of local history leaders, these programs will likely have to better coordinate their efforts and opportunities with local and regional partners.

William Stoutamire: Frank House at the University of Nebraska at Kearney

As the new director of the Frank House at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), I find myself wrestling on a daily basis with many of the issues raised by this working group. While Kearney is a medium-sized community of just over 30,000 people (UNK adds 7,000 when in session), the city is two hours away from the nearest metropolitan area, Lincoln. We thus rely heavily on the local population and on Interstate 80 for visitors.

As a small museum and historic house, but an institution uniquely positioned to tell the story of this community, we face many challenges here on the ‘edge of nowhere.’ Because my position sat vacant for a number of years, annual visitation to the museum has plummeted by more than 70% to well under 2,000/year. We have become isolated from our own constituents. Many students at UNK believe that we are the Chancellor’s house, while many community members are surprised to learn that we are more than a local events center.

So, how do we engage our nearby communities and raise awareness of our existence and our mission as a museum? This is what I would like to discuss at NCPH. Some of the solutions I’ve begun working on include:

- Developing a new marketing strategy that goes beyond our social media presence, which is currently our only ‘marketing.’
- Changing the name and mission of the institution to better reflect what we do. (ex: The ‘Kearney Museum of History’ is more clearly defined to visitors than our current name, the ‘UNK Frank House.’) This is a bold step, but one that we feel is essential to rebranding the institution, broadening our overall mission, and distancing ourselves from some of practices of the past.
- Developing new programming and interpretation that moves beyond the ‘Victorian shrine’ model. This includes serving as a community center for the arts and culture, as well as crafting permanent and temporary exhibits that tell broader stories from Kearney’s past. (ex: The house was the residency for the Nebraska State Hospital for the Tubercular for over 60 years.) We want to be a history museum in a historic house – not just that “neat old building on campus.”
- Building community/regional partnerships through the Kearney Cultural Partners. This new organization’s membership includes a dozen local cultural institutions

that work cooperatively to boost awareness of one another and, in turn, general attendance and participation at special events.

Improving our digital presence (new website, digital collections, digital tours, etc.). This will enable us to reach beyond the confines of our small community and to communicate more effectively with both our constituents and fellow practitioners.