

CDPA Membership Meeting

November 3, 2007

Houston Putnam Lowry called the meeting to order at 1:52 pm.

In attendance were Hope Allen, Mary Anthony, Elizabeth Beach, Nancy Bell, Emily Gibbs, Scott Gibbs, Sue Jayes, Wedge Jayes, Houston Putnam Lowry, Bill MacLaren, Ian MacLaren, Katie MacLaren, Martie MacLaren, Myrtle Morse, Charlie West, Connor West, Georgia West and Liz West.

Nominating Committee report:

The nominating committee recommended that the current Board be re-elected for another year.

President: Houston Putnam Lowry
Vice President: Doug Putnam
Secretary: Catharine Putnam MacLaren
Assistant Secretary: Scott Putnam Gibbs
Treasurer: Houston Putnam Lowry

Houston Putnam Lowry declared the nominations closed in the absence of further nominations from the floor. Bill MacLaren made a motion to accept all nominations as made. It was seconded by Scott Gibbs. The motion was approved unanimously.

Tyrone Farm Management, Inc. (TFMI) report:

Bill MacLaren introduced Mary Anthony, Executive Director of the 1772 Foundation (www.1772foundation.org).

Mary attended the meeting to brief members on proposed solutions to the looming crisis of 40% decreased attendance at historic house museums which has caused some to sell of assets (the example given was Colonial Williamsburg).

This decrease has been attributed to the internet, lack of interest, lack of endowments, shorter attention spans in children, competition from other activities such as TV, video games and amusement parks, increased scheduling of children's time on the weekends and No Child Left Behind - which does not include history as part of the curriculum. Of the 12,000 – 15,000 historic house museums two thirds are experiencing some sort of financial/sustainability concerns.

Some solutions to this problem have been advanced and tried:

- ❖ Placing historic houses into private hands (which happened in Colonial Williamsburg) with protections in place so that the property will be cared for and protected
- ❖ using the property for things other than a museum

Mary cited and distributed copies of an article by John Durel, Ph.D. and Anita Nowery Durel, CFRE “*A Golden Age for Historic Properties*” in which he discusses using these properties as community meeting places for groups that have different affinities so that people develop strong emotional bonds to the place through their experiences there. An example is the \$1,000,000 that a woman left to Drayton Hall because she “...had attended an evening event on the property and fondly recalled seeing the moon shining on the Ashley River.”

Mary mentioned a *New York Times* article that was published about 8 months ago that discussed the possibility that existing historic house museums may be passé and that in order for people to have a deeper connection to a place the focus has to change from “them” to “us”.

Scott Gibbs cited a *New York Times* article about places in Maryland and Virginia allowing people to take leases on properties; never own but to live in and care for them.

Mary stated that two other approaches that are being tried to solve this problem are creating “wild” displays such as Mt. Vernon’s room where snow now falls from the ceiling and historic museum houses joining forces with other organizations (other historic museum houses, nature groups, etc.) to combine forces and costs.

Nancy Bell asked Mary what the 1772 Foundation looks for when they decide to fund a project. Factors are relevance (i.e. impact), necessity, robustness (types of activities), level of historic import and architectural import. Mary stated that 1772 specializes in revolving funds (groups put together enough money to buy houses, fix them up and sell them to private owners while recouping enough to be able to do it again and again) and in agricultural programs/education.

She cited the Barn Based Education Association in Concord, MA as an example of a robust agricultural program. Also, Stone Barns in CT that was created by David Rockefeller in memory of his wife, Peggy, was discussed as another successful agricultural, farm-based education program.

Mary indicated that she is also a strong proponent of oral histories (“instead of trying to piece together what peoples’ lives were like from remnants of their lives after they’re gone let’s ask them now”) and with modern technology it is not difficult to do.

TFMI Report continued...

- Buildings and Grounds. The two buildings west of the main house now have new shingles. The closest building also has a new pressure-treated wood sill and braces under its north side. Improvements to the main house include metal ridge plates to reduce moisture entering the house, and re-glazed windows on a portion of the south side, including the second story’s Palladian window.

- Other projects for consideration include completion of window re-glazing (approx \$9,000), restoring the south end's walk-out balcony (approx \$10,000), relocating a support post under the balcony (approx \$1,600), repairing stone walls (approx \$1,500), and removing an old maple tree along the main driveway (approx \$400).
- In the course of investigating the possibility of upgrading the house for permanent residents, we compared the upstairs area over the kitchen to the area over the west parlor. Inasmuch as the second floor of the kitchen wing is in very bad shape and will likely fall apart, TFMI recommends tearing down that part of the house and constructing a two-bedroom apartment upstairs with a meeting area and kitchen below. The building area of 1,000 sq ft would cost approximately \$135,000 plus engineering/planning, demolition and septic. The estimated total cost would approach \$170,000. Brooklyn's zoning official supports the concept.

Houston Putnam Lowry stated that the Board should discuss the report and come back to the membership with some recommendations. He also reminded the membership that the fireplace in the kitchen wing was rebuilt for about \$15,000 in the 1960's.

Liz West asked if the proposed change might compromise the integrity of PE as a historic site. Houston Putnam Lowry responded that we would have to be careful in making any changes, but we had to make the house structurally sound.

Elizabeth Beach suggested that if the kitchen wing is rebuilt the upstairs might be used as a guide for how we'd like to do it.

Mary Anthony stated that people do lots of things to make places work and that there are several schools training people to be historic house educators that might be interested in collaborating. The 1772 Foundation is currently funding some research at one of the schools on greenways. Mary also stated that there might be grant money available through several Connecticut organizations to help with changes.

Scott Gibbs suggested considering taking the money and investing it in the main part of the house instead of rebuilding the kitchen wing.

Elizabeth Beach stated that her impression is that the kitchen wing may not have been in great shape when it was originally moved and attached to the main part of the house.

Houston Putnam Lowry tasked the Board with coming up with one or two ideas for review hopefully by the next membership meeting.

Bill MacLaren reported that 50 people participated in a walk led by Elizabeth Beach from Putnam Elms to Old Trinity and back during Walking Weekend in October.

Myrtle Morse commented that Mary Cross died on October 17th, 2007 at the age of 101 and made a motion for the CDPA to donate \$100 in Mary's name to the Companions of the Holy Cross. Sue Jayes seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Myrtle Morse also thanked everyone for contributing to the meal and the meeting attendees gave Myrtle a round of applause for providing the turkey. Myrtle stated that she has been self-elected the CPDA Social Chair. She also encouraged the membership to be thoughtful, careful and work together in developing a plan for moving forward.

Houston Putnam Lowry reported that the CDPA contributed \$4,000 to Old Trinity out of the Church Fund for painting based on discussion at the last membership meeting. Elizabeth Beach commented that Dick Booth of Old Trinity was most grateful to receive the CDPA's donation. Nancy Bell reported that when she and her husband had stonemasons work on their wall they sent them over to Old Trinity to redo that wall too, as a personal contribution towards preservation.

Scott Gibbs asked about the possibility of sending a condolence note to Mary's daughter, Anne. Houston Putnam Lowry will check to see if the CDPA has a current address for her.

Houston Putnam Lowry commented that it is unfortunate to find out some of the interesting things members have done in their obituaries when you might have liked to speak with them about it when they were still around.

Hope Allen suggested a memorial of some sort for Mary Cross in the chapel. She also reported that William Hutchinson Putnam III turns 15 soon.

Sue Jayes donated a book to the CDPA library, *The Life and Heroic Exploits of Israel Putnam: Major-General in the Revolutionary War* by David Humphreys, Kessinger Publishing.

Elizabeth Beach said that since Miss Morgan was a co-founder of the SCHC (Companions of the Holy Cross) they might visit sometime in the coming year.

Bill MacLaren asked if the next meeting will be the last Saturday in July (July 26, 2008). Houston Putnam Lowry said that it will be announced in a mailing.

Membership update per Scott Gibbs: Eric Forster listed as a member is actually Robert Forrester. Myrtle Morse encouraged members to "bring their own eats" next July.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:05 pm.

Katie MacLaren
Secretary