

Session Track: Special Topics
Session Code: CS03a

Paper: Looking Back to Move Forward

Presented by

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Speaker(s) Biography

Benjamin Haavik is the Team Leader of Property Care for Historic New England, formerly the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, and is responsible for the maintenance and preservation of their 36 historic house museums and landscapes. Prior to joining Historic New England in 2004, Ben was Deputy Director of the Historic House Trust of New York City where he cared for 24 historic sites throughout the five boroughs of New York City. Ben started his career at the Fairmount Park Historic Preservation Trust in Philadelphia, PA after receiving his MS in Historic Preservation from the University of Pennsylvania. In 2004, Ben was a participant in the Attingham Summer School Program in England.

Erin Knerr is currently a Kress Fellow at Historic New England. Erin received a MSc in Historic Building Conservation at the Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom.

Abstract

In the early 1990s, the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, now Historic New England, embarked on an ambitious project. The plan was to improve the environmental conditions in eight of their museum properties, a project that was generously funded by the National Endowment of the Humanities. This funding allowed extensive work to be performed at the sites. Ultra-violet protection was installed on windows, active water issues were addressed and the care of collections was improved at the sites. The second phase of the project was the installation of computer controlled mechanical systems that would remotely regulate air flow and humidity within the structure. The systems were each designed using different principles in an effort to determine which method would prove most effective.

Overall, the project was successful as many of the environmental issues were resolved. The newly installed systems provided more control, and thus conditions improved to levels that had previously never been attained. Unfortunately, the environmental systems also caused numerous difficulties. First, the control systems were to report data out to a central computer monitoring station, but the modem technology rarely operated as implemented. Second, the control software was DOS based and was out of date almost immediately after installation. Third, certain basic design elements of the systems seem incongruent with today's understanding of regulating humidity in house museum environments. Lastly, the costs of maintaining both high end control and mechanical systems were not accurately accounted.

Looking back at the past ten years it is evident that the design and operational flaws of the systems have continued to grow in size and scope. Constant monitoring and repairs confirm that though some of the systems have been marginally keeping the environments within acceptable parameters, others have fallen short. In 2007, Historic New England's Collections and Property Care teams developed a plan to systematically analyze the NEH systems and their controls. As a first step a full time staff member was successfully secured using funding from the Kress Foundation for a fellow to study the issues and analyze the system data. The fellow is currently collecting all the documentation of the mechanical systems from the NEH funded projects, processing years of monitoring data, and analyzing the perceived understandings of the systems.

This presentation will focus on the eight NEH environmental system designs and the lessons Historic New England is learning about environmental control in historic house museums from these systems.⁷

Session Track: Special Topics
Session Code: CS03b

Paper: The Osler Library, McGill University Montreal

Presented by

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Speaker(s) Biography

Julia Gersovitz is a partner in the Montreal based architectural firms of Fournier Gersovitz Moss. She has been practising conservation architecture since 1980. 2008 marks the 25th anniversary of the founding of the office., which has been the recipient of numerous design awards for its work in the field of heritage conservation. She holds a B.Arch degree (with distinction) from McGill University and a M. Sc. (Historic Preservation) from Columbia University. Since 1980, she has been an adjunct Professor at McGill University, where she teaches courses in design, history and conservation theory and practice. As well, she taught in the Masters program in conservation at the Universite de Montreal for 13 years. For the past 23 years, she has been a member of various review commissions, at both the provincial and municipal levels. At present, she is the chairman of a Planning Advisory Commission for the City of Westmount and the vice-president for the City of Montreal Comite d'architecture et urbanisme. For 20 years, she was a member of the Board of Directors of Heritage Montreal, the local activist conservation organization. In 1995, she was made a Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada.

Abstract

OSLER LIBRARY McGill University,
Montreal Canada

Since 1965, the Osler Library has been located on the 3rd and 4th floors of the McIntyre Medical Building, a modernist, curtain wall construction. The collection is comprised of priceless books and artefacts that belonged to Dr. William Osler. The Osler Room itself is of heritage value. It dates from 1929 and was designed specifically by the celebrated Canadian architect Percy Nobbs to house Osler s personal library. Originally located in the Strathcona Medical Building, the Osler Room was dismantled and relocated in the McIntyre Medical Building, when the faculty moved to its current location.

Overtime, the collection was removed from the Osler Room and relocated to 4 separate, adjacent areas. The marriage of the rectilinear Osler Library with the idiosyncratic panhandle form of the McIntyre Building created bizarre residual shapes, poorly designed to receive the shelving units needed to store the collection. At the same time, the historic room itself was left more or less vacant.

The library staff understood the collection to be at risk: the environmental conditions did not conform to current conservation standards; security provisions were insufficient to protect the collection from theft and/or vandalism. As well, there was some basic re-planning required in order to consolidate the different functions and provide better efficiencies of operation..

The program required the architects to provide museological conditions for the collection. This was done within the constraints of 3 irreconcilable conflicts

1. To provide a suitably elegant container for objects of great value
2. To create museological conditions on a shoe-string budget, with money to install a modern HVAC system, but no money to rehabilitate the surrounding curtain wall, which would be adversely affected by the higher RH values needed for the collection in the winter.

3. To reinstate the values associated with the heritage space when it no longer had its purpose-built function.

The Canadian Conservation Institute was invited to define the conservation climate parameters and to conduct a risk analysis of situation. The design solution sprang from the singular nature of the collection, and an understanding of the specific needs of the pre-1830 and post-1830 elements.

The design strategy was simple: The Osler Room became the cocoon, a climate-controlled room, tailored to the needs of the pre-1830 books. This simple concept allowed the books to be housed in a secure, stable, elegant environment. Original designs for air circulation within the bookcases themselves were discovered and reinstated. Researchers can once again consult this priceless collection as it was intended to be, in a risk-reduced environment. The minimal budget was respected. The lesson learned may not be extravagant, but it is a universal truth: the key to a successful project is often found in an analysis of the building's unique history and the possibilities that present themselves as the history is absorbed by the team. More money would not have made a better project, it might well have obscured the simplicity of the solution.⁷

Session Track: Special Topics
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Paper: 21st Century Meets the 18th on the Farm: A Case Study of Successful Collaboration

Presented by

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Speaker(s) Biography

Erik Anderson is an architectural conservator for Worcester Eisenbrandt, Inc, a commercial historic building restoration contractor in the Washington, DC / Baltimore area in the United States. He was also the staff architectural conservator for the Baha i House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois before moving to east to Baltimore. He received a M.S. degree in historic preservation at Columbia University and a B.S. in chemistry and museum studies at Beloit College.

Astrid Maas is a project manager with Worcester Eisenbrandt, Inc. (WEI) a commercial historic building restoration contractor in the Washington, DC / Baltimore area in the United States. She managed over fifty historic restoration projects in the past seven years while at WEI. The Hancock s Resolution restoration project received a Craftsmanship Award from the Baltimore Building Congress and an award for Historic Preservation from the Maryland Historic Trust. She also received Craftsmanship awards for the Hippodrome and for the Mount Vernon Ladies Club both in Baltimore.

Abstract

Hancock s Resolution is a surviving example of an 18th century produce farm, located in Bayside Beach on the eastern shore of Maryland s Gibson Island, south of Baltimore. The house was occupied by direct descendents of the family of origin until the 1960 s and the interior and exterior finishes were not significantly altered since construction in the late 18th century. The site property includes enough land and nearby undeveloped shoreline to maintain context for interpretation. Historic Annapolis Foundation recognized the high historic significance of this small site and purchased the site (1962), safeguarding the structures and landscape from unsympathetic development. The site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. The building(s) sat empty for forty years in a progressively deteriorated condition. The adopted restoration philosophy was that the general public would be able to tour the site, unaware of all of the restorative work performed, but structurally, no floor will cave in, no walls will crumble, and the no longer existent porch and store will be reconstructed based on photographic and as found evidence.

This deceptively simple site involved an unprecedented collaboration of local resources to create and execute a successful preservation program that included: design professionals, craftsman, project managers, county officials, preservation organizations and local citizens. This successful collaboration was made possible by the extent each party was engaged in the cultural value of the site. The thread that held this collaboration was spirited team efforts. As more was revealed from exposed / as found site conditions, the interpretation of the information was reviewed by all so as to preserve the historic integrity with little damage to existing material. As an example, the main house ground floor joists dated to 1785 by dendrochronology were in structural failure and were supported by a severely corroded steel beam and columns in the root cellar. The interpretation plan required the cellar be open for guided public tours. A creative solution of concealing a carbon fiber strap under a native dutchman repair along the underside of each joist allowed the space unhampered by the unsightly steel support system. This stabilization was the one of the first known uses at that time of carbon fiber for a wood restoration structural repair in the United States.

The Friends of Hancock's Resolution (FOHR) was the driving force behind the restoration and remain today very active in the interpretation and management of the site. County and preservation organizations were able to protect the buildings and the landscape with funding, and maintenance agreements. Community support for the restoration project was integral to its success.

The intent to create a site safe to visit where the public is unaware of all restorative work performed was successfully executed in the restoration of Hancock's Resolution. The collaboration of volunteers, design professionals, craftsman, government and preservation agencies allowed for creative solutions to difficult design and conservation issues during the restoration project. Visitation at the restored Hancock's Resolution increases every year since the project completion and has become a landmark among the area's cultural resources.⁷