

The State and Future of the Association

By D. Stephen Elliott, President of the New York State Historical Association
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108 years ago a distinguished group of New Yorkers had a vision for an association of kindred spirits that would provide stewardship for historical resources, support for scholarship, and a spur for education.

We are their successors. It is our turn to preserve and educate, to connect people to our cultural heritage through exhibitions and programs that provoke, delight, and inspire.

We are unique among state historical associations in how we do this. We have an historical research library, as do most, but our museum exhibits art. We partner with a sister institution whose focus is our country's rural heritage. We bring together rich and diverse resources to explore culture historically the way life is lived, not through a single discipline or lens, but, using documents, buildings, tools, and art, through work and families, their joys and tragedies, their stories and how they built and created and what they've left behind. Ours, I believe, is a truer and more engaging presentation, and our potential for impact all the more with the addition of our partnership with the Graduate Program, whose faculty and students bring zest and curiosity and fearlessness, learning, questioning, and yes, helping hands – and minds – and some exceptional staff members.

The Annual Report in your hands, and the newsletters that reach you periodically, narrate our success and activities of the past year. Rather than repeat what you can read, I'd like to spend my few precious minutes with you looking ahead, to our opportunities and challenges.

We are working to build on our successes. We aim to maintain the excellence of exhibits at the Fenimore, even as costs for the traveling exhibits that have spoiled us in recent years rise. But we also aim to build on the legacy of excellence that is our permanent collection, and to grow our own traveling exhibit program that has been so successful in recent years, reaching even more people than experience the Fenimore on-site.

We'll continue to extend the reach and educational impact of our teacher workshops and History Day program, as we have the past two years, and to integrate the study and practical applications of our graduate students with the work of our museums, that the Program may maintain a firm grasp on its premier position among graduate museum programs nationally.

And we'll develop our capability to use technology to make our resources accessible to growing numbers of distant students and "visitors." A part of this is revitalizing our publishing program in the modern sense of the word, reaching diverse audiences with content using a variety of media.

Our Library will continue to develop its role of service as a regional history repository and resource. The confidence that area folks have in our Library as they place their precious material with us is humbling and motivating.

But our Library is 40 years old and chock full of stuff. Our collections facility, retrofitted 25 years ago for this purpose, is likewise bursting at the seams. Not surprisingly, it's time to add capacity, to

outfit these vital museum facilities to continue to serve their mission and their communities. We're examining our options now for these projects.

And as we work to strengthen and improve our programs and operations, to tackle the bricks-and-mortar needs, we'll continue to need the input and support of the membership.

The staff is enormously grateful for the close relationship we enjoy with so many of our members, and we are working hard to enlist more of our visitors and friends.

So just as we'll keep reporting to you on where we're headed, what we're doing, and how we're going about it, we trust you to keep telling us what you like and don't like and how we can do better. To suggest to your friends that they become members. To support us with your time and, yes, with your contributions.

I'd like to close with a pitch the Association hasn't made before, but I think you'll agree it's appropriate and maybe even a little overdue.

Most of what we undertake, to collect, preserve, exhibit, and educate, has a price tag. Many of you have supported these initiatives generously each year.

May I join with your college and your church in asking you to consider giving the gift that keeps on giving? I ask that you please consider including the Association in your estate planning. Think of the long-term impact of many, aggregated bequests. This may be the only way, for example, that we can insure the vitality and excellence of our collection on into the future.

And it's easy, even if one has already designated beneficiaries and signed wills. Just ask your attorney to add a provision for a percentage or specified-amount gift to the New York State Historical Association. Or make us the beneficiary for that little life insurance policy you took out 40 years ago when your first child was born.

Designate for a specific purpose if you wish, such as collections acquisition, or leave it undesignated. Our Board will insure that your planned gift is used to benefit the Association in a permanent way, as you intend.

I feel it's my responsibility to extend this invitation, this opportunity to be a more-than-life-time member.

Because like those founders 108 years ago, we won't always be present at the Annual Meeting, but we can be accounted for!

So let me assure that your Association is in good shape, doing good work, and stretching its wings, and let me thank you again for being a part of this wonderful and important enterprise.