

**MVM Annual Meeting
August 13, 2012**

Executive Director's Report

Good afternoon and again...another welcome to all to today's annual meeting.

This is my third annual meeting as Executive Director. As indicated earlier in Sheldon Hackney's comments, 2011 was a year of dramatic change for the Museum. That dramatic change has continued well into 2012, but my comments today will concentrate on last year and not the current one.

As in the past, my report begins with sincere and widespread appreciation for all of the people who made last year successful...indeed the people who make every year and every day possible.

First I want to recognize the Museum staff—many with longer tenures than me and some who are relatively new—but all of who have demonstrated tremendous loyalty and energy in making the Museum a more active player on the Island's cultural scene. Our core group of ten, mostly full-time, is working harder and better to provide education and enlightened entertainment to Island residents and tourists, both young and old.

I want to ask the staff to please stand or raise you hands so we might thank you. **APPLAUSE!**

As critical as a great Museum staff is to our positive momentum, I realized the other day in thinking about my comments that "It really takes an Island to make a Museum". Indeed, it is an entire Island community that nourishes and supports our successful operations.

Just look for a moment at the back page of the printed 2011 Annual Report. There you will see a list of nearly 20 dedicated Board members, and nearly half of them are running standing or ad-hoc committees. Then there are another dozen non-Board Committee volunteers who add important perspectives to help us consider programming, plan buildings and raise funds. Also on this page you will see this year's core of interns, 12-strong, who like last year's work side-by-side with staff in doing the heavy summer lifting to get things done. I want to thank all of you, individually and collectively, for all that you do.

Next, you might open up that Annual Report to the last two pages and a listing of the 2011 Accessions. In most entries you will notice “Gift of” and then a particular person or couple or family. Last year, and in fact over the past 90 years, personal gifts to our collections allow the Museum to grow and to have the great opportunity to tell stories of the rich history of Island.

Flip back another page and you will see a list of over 120 volunteers. To say that this group supplements what the staff is able to do is to grossly undervalue both their time and experience as a contribution. Operating the Cooke House, creating and executing both our major and normal events, helping research in the Library—these are only a few of the critical functions that volunteers perform for the Museum. Volunteers are like having double our staff.

The balance of the Annual Report lists nearly 1,000 names of our 2011 Contributors. In addition to membership, the most fundamental form of a contribution, you will see names of friends, neighbors and others who have been able to be even more generous with funds that let us open our doors every day and provide programming year round.

In the remainder of my remarks today, I will highlight just four important facts about the 2011 year not already covered by Sheldon.

First, last year we opened for five-days a week the Gay Head Lighthouse: Gay Head is one of the three lighthouses we steward on the Island under a lease from the Coast Guard and other federal agencies. It proved to very popular and attracted 10,000 visitors in the 2011 summer season. Open 7-days per week this summer, the Gay Head Lighthouse continues to surprise us with its strong attraction for both daytime and sunset tours.

Second, I want to call your attention to the variety of exhibitions mounted by our curatorial staff. A photography and objects show titled “**Eisenstaedt and Us**” featured rarely seen shots from the Chilmark summer resident who treasured his time and relationships every August. A more classic history museum show traced the experiences of five Vineyarders during the Civil War in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of that war. And in late fall 2011 we opened (and today we close) an exhibition related to

our rich maritime heritage. “**Out of the Depths**” is the story of Martha’s Vineyard Shipwrecks and it is a theme that will continue to interest all of us long after the show comes down.

Third, our National Endowment for the Humanities funded interactive exhibit launched in 2010 and entitled “Laura Jernegan: Girl on a Whaleship”, received national recognition from the American Association for State and Local History and regional recognition from both the New England Museum Association and the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities.

Fourth and finally, late in 2011 we introduced our off-season “Free Saturdays” as a way of saying thank you to members and non-members alike. We used this as a means to encourage residents to have their first experience, or their first experience after a very long time, completely on us. Our interest was to attract more Islanders to consider joining the Museum, and through that membership making every day a free admission day. It seems to be working, as I can report that along with some other tools, membership is rising again for first time in nearly five years.

In closing, we need to remember that Museums are businesses. Some are large and some are small. The Martha’s Vineyard Museum is considered to be a mid-sized museum. And like many businesses, we need to regularly look longer-term to what we do, why we do it, and to whom. To this end many on the Board and staff spent a great deal of time earlier in this year developing a strategic plan that seeks to re-imagine the Museum over the next five years. Included in this plan is a vision statement that paints a picture of the Martha’s Vineyard Museum in 2017. The vision’s final paragraph is a hopeful and inspirational place to conclude my comments:

People focused on, and passionate about, this Island has been at the heart of the Martha’s Vineyard Museum transformation. Now more than a location, the Museum is a respected, vibrant and evolving destination, celebrating the Island’s culture and community, past and present. As we envision an even brighter future, we remain committed to linking the Museum and its mission to the people of Martha’s Vineyard as the institution that protects the Island’s sense of place.

Thank you,

David Nathans

Executive Director