

MVM Annual Meeting
August 12, 2013

Executive Director's Report

Good afternoon and welcome to today's annual meeting.

I follow Board Chair Elizabeth Beim's remarks about all of the plans we have been making, and indeed still are making, for the transformation of the Museum in Vineyard Haven. While the vision and opportunity of the Marine Hospital property is about tomorrow, we continue to provide you, our members and friends, with an active and energetic Museum today.

Before I call attention to a few of the highlights of last year, as this is the annual meeting for the prior calendar year 2012, I want to express my thanks to three critical groups that keep us going. I will call your attention to pages 18 and 19 of the Annual Report (hold it up) as I review them.

First, the staff with the support of a group of dedicated interns and some professional freelancers, is dedicated to the Museum in so many ways. Many of them have been here far longer than my four year tenure, and they provide leadership and hard work to make the Museum a stronger and more secure institution.

Many of the staff works very closely with the second group: the Board. They number 23 and serve on a broad range of committees that supply oversight to all our most significant functions of collections, programs, finance and development. One of our strategic plan goals was to improve the participation levels in both committee and board meetings, and in fact that happened in 2012 and continues to build even better this year.

Museum volunteers are the third group deserving special recognition. We have over 140 individuals who give thousands of hours of time. They plan and support many of our major events; they greet and monitor the Cooke House; they help in the library and with curatorial activities; and one of them actually is the skipper of our historic sailing exhibit, the Vanity. They are the best ambassadors that we have in the community. You will here more about a couple of these volunteers when we get to the Museum medal part of today's program.

If the Museum is like a 4-legged, those legs could be called Collections, Programs, Planning and Finance. Chair Beim talked about the highlights of the Planning leg. Our Treasurer will follow to give you the good news of the Finance leg. I will just spend a minute or two on the other two legs.

Our collections, already large and diverse, were improved from a variety of perspectives in 2012. They were added to, primarily by gift, in 2012. We also were able to add more than 50 new oral histories, and this area of our collections has long been very significant thanks to Linsey Lee.

Grant support, from all six Island town Community Preservation Councils have supported a multi-year effort, led by Chief Curator Bonnie Stacy, to preserve specific objects and to produce a more robust catalogue. And at the very close of 2012, the Museum was awarded its largest grant ever—nearly \$294,000 from the Council on Library and Information Resources which is funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This Mellon grant will help us spread the word about our collections worldwide.

All of this support—object gifts and grants—are terrific endorsements of the Museum collections and their value in holding the stories of the Island.

Programming, that other important leg, is how these stories come alive. Education Director Nancy Cole continued in 2012 to challenge the collections to tell new and more exciting stories, increasing our impact, both quantitatively and qualitatively, with the Vineyard school system. The Beagary Trust and the Perkins family supported this labor intensive effort that prepare a new generation of museum visitors. I need to also mention the Leavens family and their generosity in underwriting a new and now expanding Hands-on History exhibit. Now children of all ages have a chance to see and touch the past in ways that we hope make a more lasting impression.

When I started as director nearly four years ago, I suggested that there were three things we needed to do to dramatically change the perception of the Martha's Vineyard Museum—they were programming, programming and programming. The sub-text here is education, exhibitions and events.

In addition to education already reviewed, 2012 marked new highs for both the number and diversity of our exhibitions. At least 7 changing shows and 2 more permanent shows were mounted last year. The Civil War, shipwrecks, decoys, theater, Eisenstaedt, and contemporary portraiture were just some of the subjects. The entire curatorial staff should be congratulated for a job exceedingly well done.

And then we have our events. From our counting, in 2011 we produced 31 events that attracted 488 people. In 2012 we produced 55 events that attracted 890. This expansion of programming helped to support increases in both admissions and membership. We are clearly moving in the right direction.

In conclusion, I want to remember that we are a membership organization. Membership actually gives you a vote here today. But all of us on the staff, on the Board and volunteers, treat every resident, seasonal or year-round, and every visitor with the same respect we treat members. We changed our mission last year to become more active as we seek “to engage and connect the public to the Island’s history, art and culture.”

Please join us in doing this important work.

Thank you,
David Nathans
Executive Director