

2017 Year in Review – Executive Director’s Report by Phil Wallis

Vision started to become reality in 2017. After recreating our mission and vision in 2016, we embarked and completed our new strategic plan in 2017. Then, with wind in our sails from outstanding success in education, outreach, fundraising, and the unanimous approval from the Martha’s Vineyard Commission, the board made a monumental decision in October – begin construction of the new museum in Vineyard Haven! We launched our destiny. The transformation of the prior historical society into a new museum for the entire island was truly underway.

Our new mission galvanized programs and events across the museum: *to inspire all people to discover, explore, and strengthen their connections to this Island and its diverse heritage*. It called out to everyone to help in this exciting new journey to interpret the Island’s history, all the people and places, so that together we might better shape our future.

Education continued to lead the way as the museum worked within each of the seven Island’s public schools, bringing Island history to more than 1,100 Islands student, creating over 3,500 educational experiences. The Museum partnered with a diverse group of eight other Island educational organizations, including Polly Hill, Biodiversity Works, Sail MV, MV Film Festival, Island Grown Schools, MV Shellfish Group, MV Fisherman’s Trust, and The Yard.

The Education team continued to focus its curriculum on Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) priorities, adding “Math: Life or Death” , in which students learned about mean, mode, median and range using empirical data collected from Island cemeteries. Mathematics became exciting overnight! We also collaborated with WYOB radio, the local high school radio station, to produce student run “Martha’s Vignettes,” a series of 90 second snippets of Island history.

Moving to the world of exhibits and programs, we explored a variety of dynamic material. In addition to the perennial favorite exhibit *Shipwrecks!*, 2017 was a great year for exhibits (9 in total) closely involving our Island community, hosting more than 60 programs/events across the Island. The museum hosted idea parties in the community gathering people together to brainstorm ideas for exhibits and programs in the new museum. We exhibited a number of community exhibits in the Spotlight Gallery including 25 years of the Scottish Society, 375 years of the Federated Church, local immigrants from Vineyard history, the story of the Shearer Summer Theater, and more.

The museum led historic walking tours of all down-Island towns as part of the *Lost and Found* exhibit and hosted Edgartown tours weekly all summer long. The *Local Immigrants Project* brought in a diverse audience, attracting a whole new (and multi generational and ethnic) crowd to our doors. In our fifth year, we welcomed over 700 people to PechaKucha presentations all winter long at the Harbor View Hotel.

In our emerging collaboration with the island’s African American community, we hosted an evening with *The HistoryMakers*, the largest African American oral history archive in the country, beginning a collaborative partnership that will continue to grow. We also collaborated with the African American Museum of Boston and Nantucket to welcome Joy-Ann Reid of MSNBC to the Island.

In curation and collections, we acquired objects, archives, and photographs from over forty donors to the collection. This included the purchase of two whaling logbooks and the Lois Mailou Jones reference library at auction, thanks to generous contributors. We added eighteen new voices to the oral history collection. In addition, we digitized and made all our whaling logbooks accessible online through the Massachusetts Digital Commonwealth thanks to a partnership with the Boston Public Library.

Under the leadership of our Research Historian, Bow Van Riper, we saw the library activity (admissions and inquiries) grow by 23%. He also led the herculean task of expanding and recreating our *Dukes County Intelligencer* into the *Museum Quarterly*, adding two additional publications per year and giving the publication a fresh new look to compliment the transformation of the museum. The size remains the same, so all those who collect will not be dismayed!

The response from the public was tremendous in 2017. Museum logged over 4,500 volunteer hours in various departments thanks to over 130 Museum volunteers. The Edgartown, East Chop, and Gay Head Lighthouses saw over 35,000 people visit. Our prize catboat VANITY voyaged the waters of Edgartown for more than forty sails in June, July, and August.

Our focus on the capital campaign achieved new highs, as we reached nearly \$20 million by year's end. Members and donors were, as always, our most important resource. Indeed, you are the reason for our funding successes. Without you and your support, your donations of time, talent and treasure, the Museum could not exist. As well, you entrusted us with your art, objects and manuscripts that tell Island stories. We can't thank you enough for trusting us to steward the Island's irreplaceable history.

Indeed the board did make a momentous decision in October and right it was. Our museum, your museum has now officially launched its transformation. The new Martha's Vineyard Museum is now underway. Thank you all.