

CONFERENCE, 2003 Lenzburg, Switzerland

Facing and Solving the Problems of Historic House Museums, Examples and Models

(NOTE: Papers are arranged alphabetically by country)

SWEDEN - "Hallwyl Museum - A Family, a Home and a Collection"
Ingalill Jansson, Stockholm. E-mail: [Ingalill, jansson@lsh.se](mailto:Ingalill.jansson@lsh.se)

"I gradually began collecting old things, and in the end it became a passion", according to Wilhelmina von Hallwyl and this resulted in building a 1900 Stockholm house filled with her collections. In a 78 volume museum catalogue she described more than 50,000 objects. This included rare and valuable objects, as well as her collection of household objects and personal accessories that would be interesting "in a far distant future." In 1920 Wilhelmina and husband, Walther, (member of the Swiss family of Hallwyl Castle) presented the home and collections to the Swedish state and it opened as a museum in 1930 after her death. The museum offers dramatized tours with guides dressed in period costumes acting as family members and servants in a 1900 upper-class home with its well preserved interiors and large collections of art including decorative pieces. Hallwyl also contains state apartments, bedrooms, galleries, kitchen, stable, coach house and servant's quarters.

SWITZERLAND - "Cleaning Out a Mansion"
Alfred Lutz, Zurich, e-mail: Museum@rietb.stzh.ch

The Museum Rietberg in Zurich has become an art museum rather than an historic house built in the early 1850s with connections to the silk trade. Once it was also home to composer Wagner and his second wife so music tours encourage visitors' enjoyment, although featuring reproduction china and linens. After the couple left in 1858 the house was "cleaned out" and became an art museum with emphasis upon non-European art, especially that of China.

The board's decision not to focus primarily upon history has encouraged multi-interpretations. This took place more than 10 years ago with a new interpretation based upon photographs. The results have attracted more visitors and the property serves as a place for social events. Following a storm that destroyed many trees in the park a decision was made to build a new museum with work beginning in 2003 and opening scheduled for 2006. Special exhibits, visible storage and educational programming will fill this underground space.

UK - "Historic House Museums: Facing and Solving the Challenges"
Michael Day, United Kingdom, e-mail: Michael.day@hrp.org.uk

The key challenge for historic house museums, indeed for all cultural institutions, is SUSTAINABILITY, regardless of ownership, architecture and collections. Historic Houses could and should inspire a sense of awe based upon scale as well as decorative interiors; exclusion and symbol of power and privilege; a different life style; wonder and inspiration to understand the crafts that created the building and modern conservation skills. In addition, they should include a "warm welcome" and a sense of "connection" with the past.

The strengths of historic house museums include "durability, a vast range of diversity, human stories and authenticity of the place and experience to place visitors in direct touch with the past." Weaknesses include: inherent conservatism because "change is hard"; traditional practices and expectations plus a scale that often limits major numbers of visitors. Also involved are high costs of conservation, maintenance and operation. The museum and heritage sector plays a role in fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and respect, encouraging expression, debate and discussion.

USA - "Staying on Compass: Seeking Outside Voices to Sustain Relevance"
Frederick J. Fisher, Washington DC, e-mail: ffisher@hillwoodmuseum.org

Hillwood Museum and Gardens, a renowned Russian and European decorative arts collection founded by Marjorie Merriweather Post, heiress of the Post Breakfast Cereal empire and "one of Washington's grand hostesses", contains 16,000 French and Russian objects, the largest collection outside imperial Russia. Because "stakeholders" (founders, trustees, members, staff, volunteers, government and community leaders, peer professionals and funding agencies plus museum visitors) have different views many new ways of thinking and decision-making have been developed.

Visitor studies and advice from outside scholars and museum professionals resulted in a revised orientation

program and a three-year restoration project while developing a system parallel with the DEMHIST "Categorization Project". The museum reopened in 2000 and has held strategic planning sessions for the "new Hillwood". Seeking critical input from outsiders keeps information lively and comprehensive as does seeking outside professional opinions and the voices of visitors.

TOURS

- Historical Museum Aargau, Lenzburg Castle .
- Konigsfelden and Castle Hallwyl.
- Monastery of Muri.
- Museum Langmatt, Baden, plus Villa Flora and Romerholz, Winterthur.
- Castle Waldegg (Solothurn), Castle Oberhofen and Castle Hunegg, Lake Thun.
- Basel Historical Museum, Kirschgarten and Lohnhof.