Abstract

Historic New England, the oldest and largest regional preservation organization in the United States, understands that there are many conflicting needs within a historic house museum – the structure as artifact, the needs of collections displayed within the structure, and the desire to convey the stories these objects contain to the public. Historic New England has developed an interdisciplinary task force approach to synthesize these concerns, discuss them comprehensively, and come to consensus on the goals for overall conservation treatment and interpretation of each property. The Proactive Preservation Interpretation and Planning (PPIP) task force is an internal group with representatives from across the organization with expertise in building and landscape preservation, collections and conservation, interpretation and visitor experience, and marketing and fundraising. This paper will explain the PPIP process and provide examples of the collaborative work undertaken by the organization. Case studies will focus on the interaction at Historic New England between object conservation and building preservation, including a Save America’s Treasures preservation project at Beauport, the Sleeper-McCann House, the institution’s approach to environmental

Collaboration and Preservation: Historic New England and the Proactive Preservation Interpretation and Planning (PPIP) Process

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Introduction to Historic New England

Founded in 1910 to protect New England’s cultural and architectural heritage, Historic New England is a museum of cultural history that collects and preserves landscapes, buildings, and objects dating from the seventeenth century to the present and uses them to keep history alive and to help visitors, members, and the community develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for its preservation (Figure 1). The organization is a private non-profit membership based organization that is internationally known as a leader in preservation, collections, research, and innovative programming.

Historic New England fulfills its mission through five distinct yet interrelated...

conditions in house museums, and the opening of a twentieth century tenant farmhouse. This paper will demonstrate, in a practical way, how the process is applied, and what kinds of decisions and projects result.

Keywords

Historic house, architectural conservation; building preservation, object conservation; collaboration, interpretation, environmental conditions

program areas:

- Historic Properties: The most comprehensive collection of homes and properties in New England, with 36 house museums and landscapes open to the public, spanning four centuries of architectural styles and five New England states.

- Collections: The largest assemblage of New England art and artifacts in the country, an extraordinarily broad and well-documented collection of 110,000 objects of historical and aesthetic significance represents the region’s heritage.

- Archives and Publications: One million items in the collections, including photographs, architectural drawings, ephemera, manuscripts, and institutional archives, document New England’s architectural and cultural history. Information is shared through the website, Historic New England magazine, publications, and catalogues. [see http://www.historicnewengland.org]

- Educational Programs: Innovative school and youth programs use primary sources to reinforce and enrich student learning for 42,000 young people each year. Internships, fellowship, seminars and scholarly programs are offered for graduate students and the public.

- Preservation Services: Historic preservation staff works with private property owners to provide guidance and information on how to care for their historic properties and landscapes. As one of the first preservation easement programs in the country, Historic New England’s Stewardship Program is a national model, now protecting 83 properties.

Through these five program areas, Historic New England fulfills its mission to serve the public by preserving and presenting New England heritage. It does this by remaining dedicated to its vision of being the national model for the care of regional heritage landscapes, buildings, and collections and for sharing these resources to benefit diverse audiences. Through a faithful implementation of a Strategic Agenda adopted for 2011-2016, Historic New England delivers 245 unique programs and events annually, such as tours, lectures, and specialty events for its 7143 member households from New England, the nation, and the world. In 2011, onsite visitation was 176,132; school and youth programs enriched 42,077 young people from 159 communities; and the number of unique website visits was 394,916 [Historic New England, 2012].
Historic sites and collections

Historic New England’s 36 historic sites span five states and four centuries of New England life. The collection encompasses 150 structures located on approximately 1300 acres of land which range in period and style from the Jackson House, the oldest surviving wood-frame house in New Hampshire (Figure 2), to the Walter Gropius House in Lincoln, Massachusetts, home of the Bauhaus architect, and a landmark design in twentieth-century architecture (Figure 3). The diverse properties include working vernacular farms and high-style urban houses; riverfront homes of eighteenth-century merchants and country seats of nineteenth-century politicians. What makes the historic property collection special is the integrity of the entire site including the building, landscape and collections. At 26 sites the houses are furnished, (Figure 4) and regularly open to the public as historic house museums. Nine study houses and a meeting-house are unfurnished and may be visited by appointment or for special programs. These study properties offer opportunities to examine the origins of New England architecture and its old housewright traditions (Figure 5).

Fig. 2. Jackson House, c. 1664, Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Photograph by David Bohl. ©Historic New England

Fig. 3. Gropius House, 1938, Lincoln, Massachusetts
Photograph by David Bohl. ©Historic New England

Fig. 4. Billiard Room, Castle Tucker, 1807, Wiscasset, Maine
Photograph by David Bohl. ©Historic New England

Fig. 5. Abbott Lowell Cummings leading tour for Program in New England Studies at Gedney House, 1665, Salem, Massachusetts.
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Proactive Preservation and Interpretation Planning (PPIP)

The Proactive Preservation Interpretation and Planning (PPIP) task force is an internal group with team representatives from across the organization with expertise in building and landscape preservation, collections and conservation, interpretation and visitor experience, and marketing and fundraising. Over the past 12 years, Historic New England has established through PPIP a successful multidisciplinary process that:

(a) determines the period of presentation and interpretation for each property;

(b) reviews annual projects and activities to ensure the overall presentation and conservation of each property is consistent and;

(c) provides high level project management and integrated work plans to focus fundraising efforts and staff resources on selected properties.

It is through this process that the group balances the different treatment needs within the overall context of the site and the stories being told.

(a) Determines the period of presentation and interpretation

As part of the PPIP process each site is assigned a period of presentation and interpretation to guide activities on site. A statement outlines how to approach various components of the site: landscape; building exterior; interiors and objects; stories; tours; and visitor services. As part of this process each component of the site is explored, key elements or cornerstones of interpretation are established and methodologies for treatment are determined. Each team does not make these decisions individually; through the PPIP process, all of the stakeholders discuss, react to and influence each other’s initial thoughts on approach. This is a lengthy process for each property, sometime taking several years to complete, as background research needs to be completed and thought about, and care needs to go into the decision making process. Once complete, the institution has a road map for that property until the next time research or programming changes the focus of the site.

(b) Project review to ensure the overall presentation of each property is consistent

Every year PPIP reviews the projects each team is planning to ensure the appropriateness of the project in relation to presentation of the property. As guided by an institutional preservation philosophy, the general approach to the sites is to respect the historic fabric and materials that are there and, as in the case more typically of the building preservation work, when an exterior treatment like the roof or paint needs to be renewed or replaced it is replaced with the same material or in the same color that was on the building. The genesis of PPIP in the late 1990s was related to a simple painting project. The building preservation team was preparing to paint the exterior of an early Georgian style house in the yellow base color with white trim it had long been painted (Figure 6). For many years other teams in the organization had been moving towards a 1880s interpretation of the house, which required a different color. Without the central unification under PPIP there was little discussion of work plans and overall interpretation. As painting scaffolding was being deployed at the house discussion began amongst collections and interpretation teams about the opportunity to paint the house in its 1880s paint scheme. The building preservation team, in the end, did not object to this change, but this did represent a shift in both thinking and process. At the end of the project the house was painted in its 1880s palette and PPIP was formed to provide better coordination for future projects (Figure 7).
Fig. 6. Exterior of Quincy House, 1770, Quincy, Massachusetts in late 1990s with Colonial Revival paint scheme. ©Historic New England

Fig. 7. Exterior of Quincy House circa 2009 with 1880s paint scheme. © Historic New England
In any given year there may be many questions raised through routine projects. The same house noted in the example above had an asphalt shingle roof that needed to be replaced in 2011. Now being much clearer on the overall interpretive goals for the property through the PPIP process, it was suggested to change the roofing shingles from the asphalt material to the wood shingles clearly shown in 1880s photographs of the house. This material change is in keeping with the interpretation of the house and was endorsed by PPIP; thus, the change was instituted.

(c) High level prioritization, project planning and integrated work plans to focus fundraising efforts and staff resources.

A key part of PPIP projects is high level prioritization and detailed project planning that takes place to allocate staff time and institutional resources. Although there are a number of projects each year that each team undertakes that are not a part of the PPIP umbrella, the task force merges the overall institutional objectives and strategic agenda with each team’s overarching priorities, whether building preservation, object conservation, interpretation, or visitor experience, to develop a multi-year plan.

Each project is broken out into three categories:

- Tier Three represents the waiting list of properties for which Historic New England has a vision statement but perhaps projects are not yet institutional priorities or work is not actually yet required.

- Tier Two projects generally are in the research phase. This research can take many different forms: academic, consultant work or even fundraising.

- Tier One projects are those in implementation phase.

All projects are categorized in this manner and basic scopes of work are developed to establish a sequence of events. Then PPIP reviews funding possibilities, staff time, and other commitments to ensure that there are manageable numbers of projects in both Tiers One and Two.

When projects are in the Tier One or Tier Two phases a PPIP project manager is selected and a project specific team is identified to keep the project moving. The project manager generally is decided by the main component of the project. If the project is focusing on building preservation then the project manager will be from the buildings team; if the project is focused on object conservation or curatorial changes then collection services will provide the project manager; and likewise for visitor experience focused projects. The project specific team, as a subset of the PPIP task force, will also be inter-disciplinary. The different parties that have interest in the project will be involved during project planning as well as implementation to ensure smooth communication and a unified understanding of the projects, goals, and concerns. Generally PPIP project teams include members from collections, building preservation and site management, but perhaps fundraising will be involved at the early stages and public relations might be involved at later stages. If the site hosts events, rental use or educational programs then representatives from those groups will be involved.

Case Studies

Three case studies will be discussed to focus specifically on the interaction at Historic New England between object conservation and building preservation, including: a Save America’s Treasures preservation project at Beauport, the Sleeper-McCann House, a high style waterfront building with a wide array of collection types and periods; the institution’s approach to the environmental conditions in the house museums; and the opening
of the Stekiosis tenant farmhouse, an eighteenth-century farm building interpreted to the late twentieth century.

**Beauport, the Sleeper-McCann House, Gloucester, Massachusetts**

The preservation project at Beauport, the Sleeper-McCann House, in Gloucester, Mass. shows teamwork, facilitated through the PPIP process, on matters of coordination, interpretation, and technical advancement (Figure 8). Henry Davis Sleeper (1878-1934), recognized as one of America’s first professional interior designers, began construction of Beauport in 1907 as a summer retreat. The result is a dramatic two-story, shingle-style house perched on a rocky ledge on Cape Ann overlooking Gloucester Harbor. In consultation with Sleeper, local builder-architect Halfdan M. Hanson expanded Beauport throughout Sleeper’s life to create a house that ultimately included over fifty rooms on two floors, three basement spaces and three attics.

![Beauport](image.jpg)

*Fig. 8. Beauport, Sleeper-McCann House, 1907, Gloucester, Massachusetts. Photograph by Matthew Cunningham. ©Historic New England*

In 2003, Beauport was listed as a National Historic Landmark (NHL). According to the NHL nomination, Beauport is ‘nationally significant in American material culture as an important early collection of American antiques in distinctive arrangements housed within a unique architectural setting that influenced the appreciation, collection, and interpretation of American material culture, as well as the practice of interior design. This collection and arrangement by nationally noted antiquarian, collector and interior decorator, Henry Davis Sleeper, was influential in the development of Henry Francis du Pont’s Winterthur and other museum programs’ [Orwig, 2001].
Beauport’s role in the development of the museum period room approach to the interpretation of American decorative arts is nationally recognized. Beauport influenced American architectural practice and inspired others to preserve and reuse architectural details in functional contemporary settings. By extension, it also raised public support for preserving historic architectural detail still in place, thus contributing to the present historic preservation movement advocating restoration or rehabilitation of entire buildings.

The current appearance of Beauport is the cumulative result of changes made by Sleeper and Hanson from 1907 to 1934. The coursed wood shingle roof is a maze of intersecting planes and forms; segments could be identified variously as gabled, cross-gabled, shed, clipped gable, and gable on hip. The roof is further articulated with a turret, cupola, Gothic dovecote, weathervanes, and six large brick chimneys in varying styles. The house includes 106 window openings with 249 individual sash units in varying operation including fixed, casement, and double-hung. They are grouped in singles or banded and include Palladian, Gothic, bullseye, and fanlight designs. Exterior decorative wooden shutters that include small decorative cutouts of roses, thistles, and shamrocks flank several windows.

The interior is a labyrinth of approximately 14,800 square feet. Every nook and alcove holds a composition of curiosities with nearly 5,500 objects in diverse media, including textiles, paper, paintings, iron, silver, brass, toleware, ceramic, glass, leather, bone, ivory, lacquer, and wood (Figure 9). Many of the rooms are decorated to evoke historical and literary themes, arranged by Sleeper to amuse and to stimulate the imagination, not necessarily for accuracy. Today, the house and its rooms remain virtually as Sleeper left them.

The history of the landscape is similar to the evolution of the house, changing over time due to the spatial needs of the building additions and from Sleeper’s influences in historical garden movements. The Arts and Crafts style landscape is a defining characteristic of Beauport, exhibiting several key features that follow a progression from a naturalistic style to a formal style as one traverses from the land entrance to the sea entrance at the terraces. Landscape materials used to create walls and define the ground plane changed from rough stone to more formal brick. Plant palettes changed from native plants to individual specimens and hybridized plant species. Geometries changed from flowing lines to rigid rectilinear lines. Landscape spaces transition from amorphous volumes to defined garden rooms.

Beauport has been well maintained and cared for over its 100 year life, but suffers from moisture related problems due to the harsh coastal New England climate and to the architectural maze of intersecting planes and forms of its construction [1]. In order to eliminate the damage resulting from the moisture issues and protect the magnificent Sleeper interior rooms, Historic New England began to develop a comprehensive...
In 2006, the Getty Foundation supported a master conservation plan for the site. The roof, installed in 1985, was beginning to leak in many locations. All six chimneys showed evidence of leaks caused by large cracks, open joints, poor flashing or deteriorated mortar. Water entry at these locations affected the chimneys, fireplaces, and hearths. Moisture migrated into the surrounding brick floors and substantial areas of ceilings and walls had been lost due to repeated wetting. Many window components were defective. Glazing putty had lost elasticity, resulting in chipped and cracked glazing that allowed water to penetrate between the interface of the wood and glass. Misaligned sills, casings, mullions, or other parts of the windows permitted entry of snow and rain. Funding for repair of these issues came from sources including federal, state and local government and private donors.

A detailed scope of work for repairs was created for over a three year project that lasted from August 2008 until December 2011. The scope of work was in four parts: window conservation; roof and chimneys; structural and exterior work; and landscape restoration.

This project started as a PPIP project because of the high level of coordination required for the building work, extensive conservation activities for the wallpapers and objects in the house, and for maintaining open hours and positive visitor experience throughout the work. Work on the roof meant collections directly under areas of construction needed to be covered or moved. Work on the windows required collections and window hangings to be moved away from window openings. Keeping the house open to tours during construction required constant communication and coordination as construction schedules and collections safety were cross-referenced with tour schedules and possible routes to maximize the spaces available to the public.

On the technical side, the window conservation component of the project provided excellent opportunity to begin discussions about our approach to ultraviolet (UV) protection. In order to maintain objects, historic fabrics, and wall coverings, Historic New England began installing various forms of UV protection in the 1970s and 80s. The installation mainly included thick acrylic panels cut to fit the entire size of the sash and screwed directly into the Preservation plan for both the building and the landscape.

Fig. 10. Windows being removed for conservation work at Beauport. ©Historic New England
frame from the interior. Unfortunately, this approach resulted in a microclimate and created severe condensation issues throughout the house, resulting in interior paint deterioration, failure at the bed glazing, and wood rot. Collections were thus being protected at the expense of building fabric. The damage caused by these installations was well known, but no coherent conversation had taken place to develop a mitigation strategy (Figure 10).

Staff conservators and preservation staff began planning for a better approach to UV protection. After exhaustive research both groups agreed that as part of the window conservation the screwed in acrylic panels were removed and UV window film applied directly on the glass. Where budget did not allow for UV film the group determined that a thinner UV acrylic panel hung in front of the window, instead of screwed into the frame, would be the secondary approach.

Interpretively collections, visitor experience and preservation staff needed to reach consensus on exterior paint colors. With the window conservation and repairs came the need to touch up exterior paint. Over time, colors had faded or yellowed from the weather and the sun’s ultraviolet rays. Typically, new exterior painting campaigns visually matched surface colors on site, resulting in a gradual shift from dark browns to more muted browns and purples from the fading. After discovering original sidewall shingles in situ, paint analysis was performed anew and the resulted in the use of a much deeper and darker shade of chocolate brown.

As the culmination of the overall three year conservation project at Beauport, the landscape was restored to the period of interpretation in two phases: the terraces and gardens on the water side were restored in 2008 and the east gardens in 2011. The overall concept and planning for the landscape restoration was twenty years in the making. In 1989, a large-scale drainage and sewerage project disrupted much of the landscape. Recognizing that there was not a clear understanding of the history of the landscape, Historic New England commissioned three research reports. The first report outlined the general history of the landscape detailing the three owners (Sleeper, McCann, and Historic New England) and changes over time. The second report outlined how Sleeper’s vision for the landscape fit within the general context of historic garden movements. And the third report outlined the color schemes and planting plans during the period of interpretation of the site. The results showed that Sleeper was not only influenced by different periods in art and architecture for the house but was also planning and evolving the landscape with a similar eye for detail. As the building’s footprint would change, the layout of the landscape also changed. However, the basic progression concept of a naturalistic front garden to a formal seaside garden remained constant always. Working through PPIP, a comprehensive landscape restoration plan was developed. Much like the house, the landscape can be divided into several distinct units or rooms. Each unit comprises specific materials and plants that define unique characters. The terrace work focused on restoration of defined formal outdoor spaces on the seaside of the house. The work included rebuilding a knee wall that had fallen about twenty years previous and uncovering a stairway that once connected levels. These projects laid the groundwork for planting restoration focused on reinstating the appropriate scale to the garden and appropriate plants for the period and matching the color palettes in the house. Work in the east gardens reconfigured planting beds and walkways to coordinate with the character zones, removed thick yew bushes, and replanted native plant materials including bayberry, chokeberry, summer sweet, and arrow wood. A new sloping entrance path to the gatehouse allows the grounds to be more accessible to people with mobility difficulty.

Integrated planning and work plans allowed for the intense action and reaction to the project conditions. Not only was coordination key, but PPIP was able to plan out interpretive changes to the landscape and to the exterior paint colors, and develop and implement UV protection changes that are models for other Historic New England sites and for other heritage organizations through our published white papers on this topic. The project not only was a success internally but it was recognized with state and national preservation awards.
Controlling the relative humidity (RH) in a historic house museum is very difficult yet important for the long term health of the structure and the objects within. Having a unified approach is important as the group caring for the building, and its mechanical systems is often different from the team caring for the collection. In the 1990s, Historic New England experimented with eight different mechanical systems in eight different properties to determine the institution’s ability to regulate the RH in these properties to 45% RH with a cushion of +/- 5%. By the mid 2000s, it was apparent from the building side that the HVAC equipment and controls were not performing properly and from the collections side that objects were beginning to suffer. The issue had not reached a priority status, so staff members from building preservation and collections and conservation were working on different aspects of the problems without a unified approach. Through PPIP, a strategic agenda was developed to first analyze the 1990s systems, determine their effectiveness and then develop methodologies to improve conditions at the houses. This project was led and implemented in tandem by the building preservation staff and the furniture conservator, and involved two grants and a grant funded project manager.

In 1993, responding to increased concerns about the care of its collections and buildings, Historic New England embarked on a multi-year project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to improve environmental conditions at eight of its most important properties. Recognizing that controlling RH was the greatest need, Historic New England implemented a plan in four phases to: monitor and identify sources of moisture; eliminate those sources of moisture infiltration; update existing heating systems to humidity sensitive systems; and install modern controls for these systems. In addition to stabilizing the environment at the sites and demonstrating that low cost environmental control could work, the project was intended to spearhead the movement towards state-of-the-art humidity and temperature controls for historic house museums. This project was innovative for Historic New England and focused attention on environmental conditions in all its historic house museums. With the perspective of ten years (1998-2008) Historic New England was able to look back at this project and identify ways in which the program did or did not meet the goals originally outlined.

There were many issues. Monitoring before and after the project was problematic because recording hygrothermographs were expensive, sensitive, and the data was hard to analyze. The original NEH funding proposal concluded that money spent proactively to keep moisture out of a building would be money well spent, and institutionally Historic New England would reach the same conclusion today. Unfortunately not enough monitoring data exists to verify whether the work to eliminate sources of moisture alone was sufficient to stabilize RH at the sites. Seven different humidistatic systems were installed into the eight houses, partially in an effort to determine whether any single system was better than others, but the elaborate ventilation schemes did not seem able to affect a reduction in RH in the museums. There were numerous issues with the equipment installed, which was later found to be inefficient and improperly sized for the applications. Finally, the larger goal of the 1990s project was to usher in a new era of state-of-the-art controls for historic house museums. Unfortunately the controls failed on many levels, some technical, some due to the contractors and some due to Historic New England.

Due to all of these internal and external factors Historic New England has refined its approach to controlling the environment in the historic houses to the following principles:

A perfectly stable environment of 45% RH is not achievable in a historic house museum and it is likely that such an environment would be detrimental to the building fabric through four seasons. Many involved with conservation issues in historic house museums agree that a RH range of 35-60% is sufficient for most objects.
and the health of the structure. It must be recognized, however, that not all objects fall into this category and that there may be items considered for removal due to RH conditions. Historic New England has embraced a more elastic approach to stabilizing the environment, but not at the expense of the collections, buildings or finances. A range of 35% RH to 60% RH is now the goal allowing for daily fluctuations and short term spikes or dips but trying to avoid long term exposure to RH levels above or below the range [2].

It is important to not only monitor conditions in the environment but also to save the data for future analysis. Historic New England has undertaken an exhaustive process to assess its current protocols for monitoring, placement of monitors, collection of data and analysis of data. The more equipment installed in a house the more complex it becomes to operate, control and maintain. Complexity is the bane of the historic house museum, especially if site staff cannot operate the system, the local contractor cannot understand its operational guidelines, and, in the case of Historic New England, the technical staff is already stretched thin managing a number of properties in a large area.

In addition to keeping systems simple it is important to take small steps towards goals. Monitor the conditions and make small changes. If the conditions improve assess whether more changes are necessary and if the conditions do not improve look at your original assumptions. One of the failings of the 1990s project was that moisture mitigation efforts were taken and then systems were installed that relied overall on multiple components such as basement ventilation and museum ventilation without monitoring individual pieces. Historic New England is now shutting down one component at a time and monitoring if these individual pieces help the conditions or hinder.

Building on these findings Historic New England began a systematic overhaul of its data-monitoring program. New data-loggers were acquired and placed in their assigned monitoring locations and photographed. ‘Ownership’ of the data collecting process was simplified by shifting staffing to be more efficient. The photographs, site diagrams and downloading instructions were placed in the houses and assigned to the building staff responsible for those properties. A data collection, monitoring, and downloading protocol was adopted.

Historic New England then initiated a two year project to implement the findings on a practical level at four sites: Hamilton House, South Berwick, Maine; Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm, Newbury, Massachusetts; Cogswell’s Grant, Essex, Massachusetts; and Sayward-Wheeler House, York Harbor, Maine (Figure 11). The emphasis was on quantifiable changes as a result of small input. In all four cases systems had been dramatically downgraded or even completely shut down for at least a year so that baseline data could be gathered. Any modification made was based on criteria that included ease of use and ease of maintenance.

Before replacing the Hamilton House system, the building and collections were subjected to mold growth in the summers and extreme drying in the winters. The projected dimensional change of the objects through these periods was well over tolerable limits. Following the 2010 installation of the heat and dehumidification, basement and first floor environmental conditions stabilized.

The overall conditions of the museum at the Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm improved dramatically with the simple addition of dehumidifiers. An underlying drainage issue leading to high levels of moisture in the basement was too complex to resolve as part of this project, however advanced drainage planning has now been completed and the implementation of a site wide system is expected in future.

The removal of previous systems and the sealing of ductwork leading to the upper floors at Cogswell’s Grant was very successful. Conditions were further improved with the installation of a new heating system for the
When the system was officially commissioned and installed for the Sayward-Wheeler House the RH in the basement and first floor of this historically damp building immediately began to stabilize. The system continues to be perfected for maximum operation. In order to study the effects and ensure that the system nor collections were overtaxed, the RH set point was originally located high at 65% RH. The system has achieved that number and staff are progressively lowering the set point. The stabilization of the environment indicates the course of action is successful.

The grant funding expired but the institutional shift in the Institution’s thinking remains. The data collection process continues efficiently and data is reviewed on a regular basis. Findings are posted on Historic New England’s website as well as published in white papers describing the project’s data collection processes.

**Tenant Farmer’s House, Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm, Newbury, Massachusetts**

The Tenant Farmer’s House is part of Historic New England’s Spencer-Peirce Little Farm, a historic house museum in Newbury, Massachusetts, with 230 acres of farmland dominated by a seventeenth-century manor house (Figure 12). The main house was listed as a National Historic Landmark in 1971 and the entire site is

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the second most visited property owned by Historic New England, with more than 26,000 people visiting annually, including 6,000 school children. An important part of the site’s history is the tenant farmer’s house, known as the Stekionis House, which is attached to the 1690 manor house through a breezeway. It was built circa 1800 by then owner Offin Boardman, and has been home to generations of servants, family members, and tenant farmers.

In 1913, Jacob Stekionis, a recent immigrant from Lithuania, moved into the tenant farmer’s house after being hired by the farm’s owner, Edward Little. Stekionis returned to Lithuania in 1923 in search of a bride and within a year married Dorothy Januševič, a woman from a village near where he was raised. They returned to the farm in Newbury. After Edward Little died in 1935, Stekionis took over the farm’s cattle and sold the milk, in addition to growing vegetables. The Stekionis family paid no rent and received no pay but operated the farm for their own profit and had an informal agreement to provide the next generation of Littles with milk and vegetables. Jacob and Dorothy raised three daughters on the farm and resided in the tenant farmer’s house until Jacob’s death in 1984 and Dorothy’s in 1993 (Figure 13).

After five years of extensive research, conservation, and preservation work, the Stekionis House opened to the public on 2 June, 2012. The interpretive goal of the Stekionis House project was to engage visitors in a deeper understanding of twentieth-century history through the lives of a Lithuanian family who lived and farmed in Newbury, Massachusetts.

The preservation and conservation of the historic building materials was a complex undertaking, with the overall goal of protecting the historic fabric, and respecting the evolution of the building and its

Fig. 12. Installation of a simplified environmental control system includes a thermostat and a humidistat. © Historic New England

Fig. 13. View of the back of the Stekionis tenant farmhouse, Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm, 1690, Newbury, Massachusetts. ©Historic New England
finishes. Certain conditions existed that required creative thinking, such as the sensitive addition of structural supports to stabilize the second floor, the stabilization of multiple generations of plaster including repairs made by Jacob Stekionis, and the careful treatment of paint finishes to improve the overall appearance without sacrificing historic material.

Planning for the project included the use of a structural engineer. In order to convert the house from residence to museum, local building officials needed to approve use and occupancy allowances. Working through PPIP, a conceptual plan for the use of the building was developed before the structural engineer was brought in to analyze known structural deficiencies and to calculate load and occupancy capacity. At the close of the structural planning process the original use plan had to be modified, eliminating second floor access. Additional structural supports were required for two of the structural members and PPIP determined an approach that would satisfy all parties without compromising preservation principles or conservation.

There were many building preservation components to the project including window conservation, exterior wood repairs and exterior painting. This work was implemented simply and easily according to Historic New England’s building preservation standards. The interior plaster stabilization work, however, was complex and involved intense coordination. The plaster walls were bulging in several sections and needed to be stabilized and consolidated but complicating the issue was the presence of wallpaper that was vital to our interpretation of the site. After the collections team removed all of the objects from the first floor rooms the conservation
team was required to carefully remove the layers of wallpaper in the parlor and kitchen. In the parlor the wallpaper was comprised of multiple layers which were removed together, using Teflon spatulas. This treatment allowed for the preservation of the odd patches and mismatched patterns installed by Jacob Stekionis. The paper in the kitchen was a modern self-adhesive paper installed in the early 1990s, and its removal was relatively easy as the paper was stable, without rips or tears, and peeled off the wall surface easily. Members of the building preservation staff then began the process of analyzing the plaster to understand its material properties. Through this process, it was determined that there were multiple layers of repairs, many of which were suspected to be made by Jacob Stekionis, and therefore very significant aspects of the integrity of the building and story. Luckily stabilization and consolidation of the plaster surfaces was possible with minimal loss of material fabric, although some patching was required (Figure 14). Once this work was completed the walls were sized and lined with Japanese tissue and the conserved wallpapers returned to original configuration (Figure 15).

As part of the planning process interior paint analysis was conducted, with all surfaces on both the first and second floors analyzed. The focus of the report was to provide color matches for the existing top layer and immediate layer below. The reason for this is that the period of interpretation PPIP chose for the building is 1984, the year Jacob Stekionis died. Considering how recent this period is, it seemed appropriate that either of these two layers would have been in place during the interpretive period.

Actual treatment of the paint finishes was focused on the minimum of intervention possible to retain as much original fabric as possible. In most cases the goal was to carefully scrape flaking paint, lightly sand to provide
grip and feather the adjacent surfaces, and then infill paint the affected areas. Most paint colors were hand mixed on site to ensure exact color match because the paint analysis identified the pure color used but not the color after several years of exposure and soiling.

All of the furnishings and objects were removed from the first floor rooms and brought to Historic New England’s conservation lab for cleaning and stabilization. As with the finishes in the house, the goal of the conservation treatments was to present the pieces as they would have looked after years of use, rather than as they looked when they were new. The furnishings range from an overstuffed set of parlor furniture from the 1930s, to the clothes washer in the kitchen purchased in the 1960s. Using photographs, inventories, and the recollections of the Stekionises’ daughters, Historic New England staff reinstalled the family’s furnishings to appear as they did in the early 1980s (Figure 16).

Traditionally, Historic New England sites are presented through guided tours. Because of the programming methods used at the site, a new approach was adopted through PPIP, to present a self guided tour at the Stekionis House. Rails to segregate the kitchen and parlor from the entrance hall were discussed, detailed, and then installed. New interpretive panels were created to share the family stories and history with visitors.
Conclusion

Within a complex organization like Historic New England sometimes the agendas of individual teams cloud broader institutional goals, and collaboration can be difficult. The Proactive Preservation and Interpretation Planning task force [PPIP] was established to counteract decisions made in a vacuum and to provide a forum and a methodology for the different teams to interact and reach consensus. Through PPIP representatives from across the organization with different professional expertise work together for the best overall conservation treatment and interpretation of each Historic New England property.

The three projects highlighted in this paper illustrate the achievements of the PPIP process. Each had unique challenges and needed a different collaborative approach to reach a successful result. The Save America’s Treasures [SAT] project at Beauport required extensive coordination between building and landscape preservation, collections and conservation, and visitor experience teams to ensure the protection of the collections and a positive visitor experience throughout the two-year preservation project. The environmental conditions project funded by the Institute of Museums and Library Services [IMLS] brought building preservation and conservation staff members together to fully evaluate the results of earlier HVAC and climate control campaigns at several of the properties and develop a protocol for sustainable, cost-effective systems that could maintain manageable environmental conditions for both the historic structure and the collections housed within. And lastly, the opening of the tenant farmhouse at the Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm created innovative access and self-guided interpretation that allowed visitors to experience the lives of the Stekionis family while protecting and respecting the historic fabric and unusual evolution of the building and its finishes over time. Owing to the PPIP process, each of these projects was thoughtfully undertaken and brought to a successful conclusion [3].

Endnotes

[1] Gloucester, Massachusetts can average overnight lows of 20 degrees Fahrenheit (-7 Celsius) in the winter and daytime 80 degrees Fahrenheit (27 Celsius) in the summer and receives between 3.5 inches and 4.8 inches of rain per month. (http://www.weather.com/weather/wxclimatology/monthly/graph/USMA0153 [accessed March 2013]). Average humidity is between 55% and 80% all year round. (http://www.city-data.com/city/Gloucester-Massachusetts.html [accessed March 2013]) The prevalent storm type in New England is the northeaster which manifests itself in wind driven rain and coastal flooding which Beauport is especially prone because of its location directly on the harbor. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nor%27easter [accessed March 2013]).

[2] The previously commonly accepted museum environmental standard of 50% RH at 70 degrees Fahrenheit (21 Celsius) was ultimately, and possibly inappropriately, applied to the 1990s HVAC project at Historic New England. Original project material indicates a range of RH was to be acceptable however analysis of set points in the control systems showed a lack of flexibility. Relaxing the RH standards has been a topic for many years. Rick Kerschner’s ‘A Practical Approach to Environmental Requirements for Collections in Historic Buildings’, JAIC 31(1992): 65-76 continues to be an important summary. In recent years this topic is found discussed in many symposia and articles including ‘The Museum Environment: Transforming the Solution into a Problem’ by Steven Weintraub, Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals, Volume 2, Number 3, February 2006, pp. 195–218.

References:


Websites:


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