



## **Museums for America**

**Sample Application MA-11-14-0202-14**

**Project Category: Learning Experiences**

**Funding Level: \$5,000-\$25,000**

### **Historic Cherry Hill**

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$23,394
Amount of cost share:	\$12,819

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Abstract
- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

## HISTORIC CHERRY HILL

### ABSTRACT

Historic Cherry Hill (HCH) proposes to undertake a one year planning initiative, *Outdoor Life*, to develop public programming on our urban museum's underutilized landscape. This initiative will attract new audiences and better connect the museum with its local Albany community. Working in partnership with community groups, HCH will create high-quality, interactive, and relevant learning experiences linking history, agriculture, and nature. These programs will (1) spur users to think critically, (2) cultivate community pride, and (3) connect neighborhood residents to the green “oasis” at Cherry Hill—a rare commodity in Albany’s blighted South End.

Like many inner-city museums, HCH has historically struggled to provide museum resources to our low-income, high-need urban neighbors. With the restoration of its historic grounds scheduled for completion in 2015, the museum plans to develop landscape programming and will use this exciting opportunity to forge relationships with its surrounding communities by creating engaging audience-centered and needs-based programming.

*Outdoor Life* is a one-year planning project (October 1, 2014-September 30, 2015) to develop four public programs which will highlight different aspects of the HCH landscape and address the needs of various audiences. The programs will draw upon the Cherry Hill family's outdoor life, spanning five generations (1787-1963), which involved farming, gardening, animal husbandry, work, and recreational activities, all amply represented in the extensive family collections. A summer camp for families will integrate nature and history activities for hands-on learning, which will provide shared experiences for an inter-generational audience. A vegetable garden project will be developed to give neighborhood teens decision-making and leadership opportunities and an understanding of what is involved in the stewardship of historic places. A special community event on pets will draw on HCH's extensive pet collections and emphasize the social history of animal-human interaction. And a special program on the Colonial Revival garden, exploring garden aesthetics as well as hidden nativist agendas, will build on successful interpretive endeavors with general audiences. The latter program will allow HCH to tackle issues with contemporary resonance, such as immigration and how families like Cherry Hill’s responded to related social changes.

The *Outdoor Life* project will reach out to an array of community groups to involve residents in program development through meetings, focus groups, questionnaires, limited field testing and user evaluations. Ultimately we hope to make lasting partnerships that will make HCH more responsive to community needs and result in dynamic and relevant programming.

*Outdoor Life* will provide a model of how historic house museums can involve different audiences in the community in shaping programs which are meaningful and engaging to them. It will also be useful for a variety of nonprofit educational organizations that need to develop programs for high-need, diverse audiences.

## Background and Project Context

Historic Cherry Hill tells a story of America through the lives and experiences of five generations of an Albany, New York, family. One of Albany's most recognizable landmarks, Cherry Hill, built in 1787 for Philip and Maria Van Rensselaer, is rare among this country's house museums. Its extensive and intact collection is unique. It includes more than 70,000 items—decorative arts and furnishings, books, diaries, documents, clothing and household textiles, and other objects reflecting daily life in the structure and on its landscape—all related to the family that lived in the home between 1787 and 1963.

With a \$575,000 challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the museum is in the midst of a major capital campaign. The \$2.3 million “Telling a Bigger Story” initiative will transform the site from “just” a historic house museum into a center for the study and interpretation of American social, political and economic history. Campaign funds are supporting restoration of the site, including its landscape features, and the preservation of and access to its collections. The capital campaign is integral to stabilizing operations and sustaining the institution's resources and initiatives well into the future.

Originally part of a 900-acre farm, Cherry Hill evolved from a working farm to a 20<sup>th</sup> century urban home comprised of five acres, which the museum retains today. The grounds are comprised of groomed lawns, garden areas and wooded lots. Recently restored features include an arbor and pear copse, and short-term plans include re-creation of a garden temple, vegetable garden and dog yard.

With grant funding, the museum undertook an extensive Historic Landscape Study in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While it provides some critical background information on the evolution of the landscape, it is in dire need of updating, particularly because the museum's furnishing period of 1945-1954 (including the landscape) was defined after the report was done. The museum intends to seek funding from the Preservation League of New York State in spring 2014 to update the Historic Landscape Report. While we are optimistic that the request will be funded, we are exploring other private sources as well.

### 1. Project Justification

- What do you propose to do?

Historic Cherry Hill (HCH) proposes to undertake a one year planning initiative, *Outdoor Life*, to develop public programming on our urban museum's underutilized landscape. This initiative will attract new audiences and better connect the museum with its local Albany community. Working in partnership with community groups, HCH will create high-quality, interactive, and relevant learning experiences linking history, agriculture, and nature. These programs will (1) spur users to think critically, (2) cultivate community pride, and (3) connect neighborhood residents to the green “oasis” at Cherry Hill—a rare commodity in Albany's blighted South End.

- What need, problem, or challenge will your project address?

*Outdoor Life* will transform the Cherry Hill landscape—an underutilized community asset ripe with unrealized interpretive potential—into the focal point of high quality community-centered programming for the museum's underserved neighbors. HCH currently has no landscape interpretive programming. After a 2001 reinterpretation, which redefined Cherry Hill as a Colonial Revival site reflecting 200 years of family living, and after a four-phase restoration of the historic house (nearing completion), HCH's interpretive staff is poised to focus its attention on the restoration and re-

interpretation of its five-acre landscape. In spring 2014 the museum will apply for a Preserve New York grant from the Preservation League of New York to update the existing historic landscape report, focusing on the interpretive period of 1945-1954 (the furnishing period of the historic house). In preparation for this updated report, a volunteer gardener and researcher, under the Curator's direction, has already digitized 128 historic photographs of the Cherry Hill property, identified horticultural specimens and landscape features in the photos, and arranged them chronologically with a special section dedicated to the site's primary interpretive period. Although work has already begun on restoring some landscape features, several features, including a vegetable garden, flower borders, a rose garden, a garden "temple," and a dog yard, still need to be created. This new landscaping presents an opportunity to create dynamic public programming which will appeal to diverse audiences including those in the surrounding low-income, underserved community.

Like many inner city historic sites, Cherry Hill has struggled to reach its immediate community. Compounding *this* museum's challenge is the fact that the family that lived at Cherry Hill until 1963 *actively* attempted to shut itself off from its surrounding working-class neighborhood, sometimes through visible means still embedded in the landscape (fences, trees, etc.). Encounters with other neighborhood residents were often negative, and the legacy of this relationship arguably lingers. In its core tour, *The Rankins of Cherry Hill: Struggling with the Loss of their World*, HCH interprets the 4<sup>th</sup>- and 5<sup>th</sup>-generation Cherry Hill occupants both honestly and sympathetically, encouraging visitors to connect emotionally with the family while also establishing critical distance to evaluate their choices. *Outdoor Living* affords the opportunity to extend this brand of interpretation to the landscape, while meeting the recreational needs of the community and clearly communicating to our neighbors that *this site belongs to them*, and they are *welcome*. To communicate this message, HCH will reach out to and work with community groups to a degree unprecedented in the museum's history.

- Who or what will benefit from your project?

In addition to its general audience of regional residents and heritage tourists, the children, teenagers, and families that live in the museum's surrounding South End will be the primary beneficiaries of *Outdoor Life*. Many of these residents have little access to green space. Although many walk by the museum daily to visit a small park in the area or wait at nearby bus stops to reach more distant parks with more amenities, few stop at the museum to take advantage of its historical or landscape resources. Most are not aware of the acreage that exists behind the historic house, most do not know whether they are permitted access, and—with no interpretive programming—most do not know *how* to utilize this green space. With a poverty level 114% greater than the broader Albany area, the South End is home to a diverse population of minorities and low income residents who seldom visit traditional cultural sites.

For many years, HCH has successfully served low-income, high-need children from the South End and the City of Albany through its school programs. For the past three years, HCH has had an on-going partnership project with the Albany public schools and a number of community granting organizations that has resulted in over a thousand city elementary students participating in the museum's school program, **The Hudson River Trading Game**. HCH has been recognized nationally for creating high-quality, thought-provoking education programs for children and teenagers. The museum will bring this successful track record to this project.

HCH will also bring to this project its rich interpretive assets—the many stories and experiences—the farming, gardening, animal husbandry, work, and recreational activities—of the five generations who occupied Cherry Hill. These stories are embodied in the 70,000-item intact family collection of manuscripts and artifacts, including gardening and farming tools, toys and games, canning materials,

family recipe books, diaries and letters describing agricultural and horticultural pursuits, maps and photographs of the property, seed catalogs, and the “Bunnie Papers,” a series of drawings and accounts documenting the animal husbandry enterprise and imaginative play of the fifth-generation Cherry Hill children. By introducing programming which draws upon these collections and links history, agriculture and nature, *Outdoor Life* will enhance the experiences of current and future HCH visitors, including its relatively unreached neighbors.

- What are the intended results of your project?

This project will address the needs of several audiences. A *nature/history program* geared to children and families in the immediate community will provide them with hands-on recreational learning experiences and increase appreciation for their local environment and history. The *garden project* will give teens from the community decision-making and leadership opportunities and an understanding of what is involved in the stewardship of historic places. A *special event on pets* will have wide appeal and spark new perspectives on the landscape and the social history of animal-human interaction. And a *special program on the Colonial Revival garden* exploring garden aesthetics as well as hidden nativist agendas will build on past successful interpretive endeavors with general audiences. The latter program will allow HCH to tackle issues with contemporary resonance, such as immigration and personal response to social change.

A major goal of this project is to become a community anchor for the South End. This will be achieved by establishing and building relationships with community groups and by involving them in the development of the programming. We will reach out to local organizations such as the South End Neighborhood Association, Trinity Alliance of the Capital Region, Capital District Community Gardens, Boys and Girls Club, church youth groups, and other community urban agricultural organizations and grassroots groups who are concerned with improving the quality of life in the South End.

- How will your project advance your institution’s strategic plan?

Historic Cherry Hill's mission is to interpret and provide access to one Albany household's rich historical resources and, through its educational initiatives, spur users to view history and historic sites differently by thinking critically about why they matter. This project will thematically integrate the historic house, collections, and landscape to spark new thinking about the site's environment and history. Programs will situate Cherry Hill’s history within a neighborhood context and encourage visitors to consider Cherry Hill’s place in an evolving community’s history. Programs will utilize the site’s history and explore relevant issues while also fostering appreciation for the site’s aesthetic qualities.

The strategic plan specifically identifies advancing community and stakeholder engagement as a major goal by reaching the widest possible audience as well as attracting participation from those with special interests. *Outdoor Life* will advance that goal with its proposed programming geared to attract South End families and youth, the general public, and those people specifically interested in garden and landscape history and design.

Facilities and Preservation goals specify restoring the grounds to the period of 1945-1954 by 2015 and Interpretive Program goals include hiring an Interpretive Specialist to develop landscape programming. Funding would allow us to fill this key position.

The strategic plan's goals include establishing partnerships with community and cultural organizations and seeking collaborative funding opportunities. This planning project will establish additional museum/community partnerships and identify possible collaborative funding sources for future implementation of the programs.

## 2. Project Work Plan

- What specific activities will you carry out?

*Outdoor Life* will plan and develop four public programs which will highlight different aspects of the HCH landscape. (Implementation funds will be requested for the following year, October 2015-September 2016.)

- **Summer Camp**

Audience: families and children from the local community and area.

Programs will emphasize observation, critical thinking and literacy skills, and having fun. Programs could include: *Hands-on Gardening* (science experiments; activities highlighting agriculture at Cherry Hill then and now; apple cider making; good nutrition activities; family recipe exchange; activities contrasting food preservation then and now); *Explore Nature* (plant and tree identification at CH and in the surrounding neighborhood; collection of wild edibles; creative writing and song writing activities inspired from Cherry Hill children's documents; nature craft activities); *Investigate the Bunnie Papers*, the Rankin children's early 20th century produce and pet enterprise (activities could include learning about raising rabbits and chickens, recreating some of the Rankin children's activities such as making money, postage stamps and trade cards featuring the pets and writing newspaper reports and stories about their own pets). Based on feedback from past family programming, HCH has determined that more opportunities for inter-generational programming need to be provided at the museum. The project will reach out to community groups to identify parents/grandparents to serve in focus groups to help HCH determine relevant topics, needs, scheduling and structure of the summer camp programs. Some of these activities will be field-tested and evaluated in this planning year.

### **Garden Project**

Audience: Teenagers from South End community. This will involve planning for the re-establishment of a vegetable garden plot at Cherry Hill. The museum will work with local youth agricultural groups to identify interested teenagers and develop a training program on best agricultural practices and decision making skills. As part of this project, educational activities will be designed for the teens to investigate Cherry Hill's agricultural history. Several organizations have expressed an interest in helping the museum with this project including: Youth Organics, Capital District Community Gardens (both of which have gardens in the South End), and Albany County Cooperative Extension.

### **Community Event on Pets**

Audience: general. Participants will experience the Cherry Hill landscape from a pet's perspective. Activities could include scavenger hunts for children on the history of pets at Cherry Hill; workshop on dog training (an activity of the last Cherry Hill family member); talk and exhibit of special pet-related objects at HCH from the 19th and 20th centuries (cages, photographs, materials from the Rankin children's *Bunnie Papers* such as pet genealogies, drawings, wills, maps, and club and business accounts); a dog show; a talk on pet psychology; workshop on pet health and nutrition. The museum will draw on focus groups who are residents from throughout the city of Albany to

help determine relevant and appealing activities. These focus groups have been effectively used in an on-going HCH initiative, Partners for Albany Stories.

#### **Lecture on the Cherry Hill Garden in the 20th Century**

The garden was a refuge and a retreat for the Rankin family as well as an expression of Cherry Hill's Colonial Revival character. Historian Erin Leary, a consultant on this proposed project, will present a lecture at the end of the planning year, in September 2015, when garden restoration is largely completed. The lecture will draw from Leary's own research at Cherry Hill as well as her PhD dissertation "Decorating for Discrimination: Nativism and Eugenics in American Decorative and Domestic Arts, 1893-1924."

- Who will plan, implement, and manage your project?

Education Director, *Becky Watrous*, will manage and oversee the project, including timeline, reporting and budget. She will work closely with the Interpretive Specialist in establishing community group relationships and facilitating focus group meetings, ensuring the programs reflect the target audiences' needs and educational goals. Watrous received an M.A. in Museum Studies and has designed award-winning school and adult programs. She has successfully coordinated a number of state level grants which included collaborative projects with other institutions.

*Shawna Reilly* will serve as the Interpretive Specialist. In addition to working with community groups to assess the needs of intended audiences, Reilly will research and design all programs, incorporating evaluative data. She will also identify resources needed for implementation. With dual M.A. degrees in Public History and Teaching Social Studies, an internship experience at HCH, and a background in outdoor education (including ecology and agriculture), Reilly has strong skills for this project.

*Erin Leary* is a historian, instructor, and PhD candidate who has done extensive work on the Colonial Revival and Arts and Crafts movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a former HCH research intern (focusing then on Cherry Hill's 20<sup>th</sup>-century landscape) and a scholar, she is familiar with the HCH collections and can provide a uniquely informed perspective on the landscape and history of the site. Leary will provide advice concerning research sources and methodology, suggest readings, and review program drafts. In September 2015, she will present a program on the Colonial Revival aspects of Cherry Hill's landscape.

As a member of the interpretive team, HCH Curator, *Deborah Emmons-Andarawis* (M.A. in Public History), will facilitate access to collections, review interpretive content, and participate in meetings with Watrous, Reilly, and Leary.

The Education Director and Interpretive Specialist will meet biweekly for the first six months of the project when the programs are being researched, developed and assessed. Thereafter they will meet monthly to incorporate audience feedback and develop a final plan. The historian consultant will meet with the staff in the first month of the project, communicate via email and phone for the rest of the project, and come for a final site visit at the end of the project.

- When and in what sequence will your activities occur?

Timeline:

October 2014 - Team meets to discuss the goals of the project, identify research topics, sources and methodology, audience participation and assessment techniques. Roles and schedules are clarified.

Program research and development begins. Watrous and Reilly discuss community building experiences with other inner city historic sites that have extensive landscape-based interpretive programs (Wyck in Philadelphia, PA, and Weeksville Heritage Center, Brooklyn, NY).

November 2014- March 2015 - Staff initiates liaisons with community target audiences; plans and implements focus group meetings. Program research and development continue with periodic team evaluations.

April 2015-September 2015 – Watrous and Reilly visit Wyck and Weeksville Heritage Center to observe programs in action; Staff incorporates audience feedback and insights from site visits into programs; teen garden project training program is developed through visits and meetings with youth agricultural organizations; aspects of the family summer camp program are field-tested; all program development is finalized and evaluated by team. Historian develops landscape program and presents it at HCH in September.

- Financial, personnel, and other resources:

Staffing: HCH will provide an Education Director with 32 years of experience designing and implementing diverse education programs and collaborating with community organizations. The museum needs IMLS support for the two consultants--Interpretive Specialist and Historian, individuals both ideally suited for their positions. Additional needs include travel costs for the historian and office equipment required for a work station so that the Interpretive Specialist can work on-site.

Collections: The museum's resources include extensive collections related to the outdoor life of the Cherry Hill family—collections spanning the 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries and relating to agriculture, gardening, recreation, work, animal husbandry. Some items have been extremely well researched such as the Cherry Hill family's 19th and 20th century pet collections featured in the publication, **Pets in America: A History**, by Katherine Grier. The family collections have always served as a rich source for education programming.

- Tracking Project Progress and Communicating Results:

The progress of this project will be tracked by periodic staff meetings to update and adjust the content and course of program activities, as needed. Progress will also be tracked through the results of the focus group meetings and related questionnaires. The field testing and user/staff evaluations of prototype summer camp activities for families will also be an important means of measuring whether or not program goals are being met.

HCH will share the program development process and the community outreach efforts through its newsletter and social media. Staff will also pursue opportunities to share their experiences with setting up community-based landscape programming at presentations and workshops wherever possible to benefit others in the museum and non-profit education fields.

### 3. Project Results

- What knowledge, skills, behaviors, or attitudes do you expect to change and among whom?  
For audiences who already visit and value HCH, we want them to:
  - recognize the landscape and garden as an important part of Cherry Hill's history
  - recognize that Cherry Hill's landscape features reflect the way that its occupants viewed their

world

- increase their enjoyment of the landscape as a recreational space

For audiences who don't currently come to HCH, we want them to:

- increase their visitation to the site and participation in our programs
- recognize the value of HCH in providing learning and recreational activities to their community

For the museum (board, staff and volunteers), we want to experience:

- experience a change in attitude towards the needs of various audiences including the immediate community
- develop a greater understanding of the role of the landscape and garden in Cherry Hill's history
- become a community anchor valued by our immediate neighbors

- How will you measure success in achieving your intended results?
  - interviews with a minimum of 6 focus groups made up of community residents representing the various target audiences (families, general public, youth agricultural organizations and interested teens)
  - written questionnaires from above
  - document summer camp field testing and user evaluations
  - volunteer/staff meetings to share and discuss program goals and content
- What project results will be of value to the field?

*Outdoor Life* will provide a model of how historic house museums can involve different audiences in the community in shaping programs that are meaningful and engaging to them. We hope to show how landscape programming, in particular, can meet the needs of those in low-income, high-needs communities which surround so many of our urban historic sites in America.

- How will you sustain the benefit(s) of your project?

The development of landscape programming is an integral part of the museum's strategic plan to preserve and restore the grounds. The first year of *Outdoor Life* will develop strong audience-based programs and establish relationships within our community. With the groundwork carefully laid, and community partnerships forged, the museum will apply for implementation funds from Museums for America in 2015, the year HCH grounds will be fully restored. The museum is committed to completing the interpretation of the site through landscape programming which will also strengthen its connection to the community. It will commit its own resources and seek additional funding sources to ensure the long-term sustainability of the landscape interpretive programming.

Additionally, Historic Cherry Hill is part of a citywide collaboration known as Partners for Albany Stories (PASt). Founded more than three years ago, the group has been working on the city's first-ever interpretive plan. With a draft nearing completion, the group is poised to develop an array of program offerings. Historic Cherry Hill's *Outdoor Life* series will offer spin-off opportunities for several other partner sites.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Oct. 2014</b>	<b>Nov. 2014</b>	<b>Dec. 2014</b>	<b>Jan. 2015</b>	<b>Feb. 2015</b>	<b>Mar. 2015</b>	<b>Apr. 2015</b>	<b>May 2015</b>	<b>June 2015</b>	<b>July 2015</b>	<b>Aug. 2015</b>	<b>Sept. 2015</b>
<b>Summer Camp</b>		Program research	Establish liaisons with community organizations serving families	Establish liaisons with community organizations serving families	Community focus groups & questionnaires	Develop program activities	Develop program activities	Develop program activities	Field testing	Field testing	Incorporate user evaluations Resource list for implementation	
<b>Garden Project</b>	Phone conversations with Wyck & Weeksville to discuss their community-based gardening/ landscape projects	Program research	Establish liaisons with community garden groups	Establish liaisons with community garden groups	Meetings with community garden groups	Focus group with teens		Observation of youth organics programs Develop youth training program Travel to Wyck & Weeksville for program observation	Develop youth training program	Recruit teens	Recruit teens Resource list for implementation	Recruit teens
<b>Pet Event</b>	Phone conversation with former Interpretive Programs Asst. at Clermont about their pet event	Program research	Program research	Program research	Contact focus groups	Community focus groups & questionnaires	Develop program activities	Develop program activities	Develop Program activities	Develop program activities	Resource list for implementation	
<b>Garden Lecture</b>									Develop garden program	Develop garden program	Develop garden program	Present garden program
<b>Outdoor Life Team (4)</b>	Project planning meeting: goals, audience, programs, methodology, & timeline				Project review		Project review		Project review for final report		Draft final report	Submit final report