

Historic Deerfield Completes IMLS- Funded General Conservation Survey

by Amanda Lange, Director of the Curatorial
Department and Curator of Historic Interiors

STEWARDSHIP OF BUILDINGS and collections is a trust that all museums should uphold, and Historic Deerfield is no different. In 2013, the museum received a Museums for America grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), an independent federal agency charged with creating strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. The grant enabled the museum to conduct a General Conservation Survey of Historic Deerfield's 18 museum buildings and their nationally important collections of New England furniture, early American silver, English, Chinese, and American ceramics, New England textiles and fashion, and related decorative arts.



Helping us to survey our collections and storage areas were Mary Jo (MJ) Davis, a conservator in private practice from West Burke, Vermont, and Barbara Moore, a conservator in private practice from New Castle, New Hampshire. MJ graduated from the State University College at Buffalo in 1994 with a Masters in Art Conservation, and received a Certificate of Advanced Study in paper conservation from the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University. Barbara Moore studied conservation at the University of London, and has headed conservation laboratories at Arizona State Museum, Peabody Museum (Yale), and the Strong Museum, Rochester, New York. She now works as a consultant for museums and other cultural institutions across the country.

As part of the survey, MJ and Barbara assessed environmental conditions in Historic Deerfield's houses and museums and evaluated the condition of our collec-



Top: Preservation Architect Tom Keefe examining the attic of the Williams House. Top right: Conservator Mary Jo (MJ) Davis looking for issues behind a desk in the Williams House Office. Left: Conservator Barbara Moore taking an ultraviolet and visible light meter reading in the Williams House Kitchen.



tions. They specifically looked for issues related to temperature and relative humidity levels, light, pollutants, pest activity, and exhibition and storage methods. Their survey made long and short-term recommendations for improvements to exhibition and room displays and storage areas. They also reviewed the museum's collections management policy and our emergency preparedness plan.

Thomas F. Keefe, a partner in the firm Keefe and Wesner Architects, works as a historic preservation consultant based in Middlebury, Vermont. Tom's area of responsibility was the conservation assessment of the 18 buildings (mostly historic structures) from top to bottom. Working with Architectural Conservator Bill Flynt, and Superintendent of Properties Maintenance George Holmes, Tom examined the exteriors of buildings looking for any issues with roofs, chimneys, woodwork, masonry, doors and windows, paint, and the foundation. Inside the historic houses they examined each structure from the attic to the basement—searching for potential problems caused by settling, insulation and heat loss, moisture and condensation, and insects and rodents, as well as examining the overall stability of the building. In addition to the survey, Tom, MJ, and Barbara reviewed preservation of historic properties, care and handling methods for collections, and housekeeping methods for historic houses with the Historic Deerfield staff during a half day, on-site workshop.

The efforts of our three consultants provided detailed information about each building and the collections displayed and stored within, as well as a prioritized list of projects to help us plan for the next ten to fifteen years of future work. Museum staff will work on issues relating to storage and workspaces, upgrading existing security systems, gaining better control over the environmental conditions in the historic houses, and focusing on collections stored in barns. Based on the recommendations of the Conservation Survey, Historic Deerfield has already received two National Endowment for the Humanities Preservation Assistance grants for environmental monitoring equipment and enhanced emergency preparedness training.

Historic Deerfield's Strategic Plan outlines a goal to "create a plan for the long-term stewardship of the museum's historic structures and collection objects." This strategic objective has been given the highest priority by the museum's Board and administration. Historic Deerfield's goal is to provide the best-planned, long-term professional care of these important collections and buildings, and to serve as an example to the public, the professionals and students who attend programs and courses at our institution, and to other museums and historic houses in the nation.