SPRING 2011

Currents

207 York Street ■ P.O. Box 312 ■ York, Maine 03909 ■ 207.363.4974

MUSEUMS of Old York

www.oldyork.org

New Strategic Plan!

It may not sound like the most exciting topic for a newsletter, but MOY staff and trustees are highly energized! What lies in store? Help us dream of the possibilities.

Museums of Old York serves three important community needs: helping to preserve the historical character of the town; providing life-long learning for residents and visitors; and creating community-building experiences for residents. In serving these needs, Old York is a vital contributor to the quality of life in our region.

This is a critical time, rife with challenges for local historical organizations. We can no longer simply open the doors to historic houses and expect significant numbers of people to take tours. Our traditional offerings have lost favor in an era of many options for people's leisure time and money. We have to find new ways to play meaningful roles in our communities.

Old York has been nimble in reacting to the situation. We built our visitor center to give us the ability to respond to popular interests with changing programs and exhibitions. We have refurbished the Hancock Wharf for use by a threatened, traditional industry in York, commercial fishing. These activities speak to our mission in different ways, engaging new constituents and generating operating income. Still, we are forced to operate so leanly that staffing our various activities sometimes seems precarious, and the financial challenges of caring for our many historic buildings remain daunting.

Over the fall and winter, Old York board and staff members have been working on a new strategic plan. We are engaged in a full re-examination of our mission, our assets and our possibilities. Later this year, we will seek reactions to our unfolding ideas from members and audiences. We look forward to your participation in developing a new vision.

Even as we plan, Old York has already become involved in a new role: helping shape the future of York Village. The visitor center has been the site of two very lively discussions with business people and residents about how to preserve the village's character, revitalize it economically, and improve it as a center of community. Representatives from Old York will sit on an advisory committee the Town of York is forming for the village.

The climate that seems so challenging also presents opportunities. Old York will likely change, perhaps dramatically, in the next decade. With the kind of community participation and support we have enjoyed for over 100 years, we will emerge vital and strong, ready to further our mission to preserve and educate in ways no one anticipated a century, or even a decade, ago. Stay tuned for opportunities to become involved in this process.

~ Scott Stevens, *Executive Director*

OLD GAOL
1719

ELIZABETH PERKINS HOUSE
c. 1730

JOHN HANCOCK WAREHOUSE
c. 1740

EMERSON-WILCOX HOUSE
1742

OLD SCHOOLHOUSE
1745

JEFFERDS' TAVERN
1754

RAMSDELL HOUSE
c. 1820

REMICK BARN
1834

GEORGE MARSHALL STORE
1870

LIBRARY & ARCHIVES
1900

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A Museum With a View... and a Vision!

July day at the sculpture garden, George Marshall Store Gallery

The mission of the Museums of Old York is to preserve and promote the rich history of the York region through programs and educational experiences that enhance historical perspective and build on community pride.

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Strategic Planning Striding Forward

This column in the last issue of *Currents* described the need for a new strategic direction for Old York. Recognizing the challenges local historical societies and house museums face across our country, Old York is looking beyond our traditional operating model for better ways to serve our community. Museum tours and many current programs draw far too few people to support the upkeep of our historic buildings.

Decades ago, touring a historic house and appreciating fine antique furnishings were meaningful ways for thousands of people to explore their heritage. Today, far fewer people are interested. We have to find other means of preserving these treasures and helping people find personal connections to our past.

Our first goal in creating a new vision for Old York was to revisit our subject. Since our founding in the era of the Colonial Revival, we have emphasized life in the 1700s. However, York's history since English settlement spans more than four centuries. York residents often find late 19th century and 20th century York history more appealing. Furthermore, to distinguish ourselves from other museums in coastal New England towns, we need to focus on what characterizes our community. Indeed, our new role includes strengthening community pride.

View from the Elizabeth Perkins House in late June

Accordingly, staff members, local historians, and the board have developed a statement of six historical themes around which to orient our holdings and all our activities. Currently, we are reevaluating our buildings and collections in light of this special history. Teams of trustees, staff members, and volunteers are studying all of our properties: how each one relates to our themes, and how it might be used to make Old York a more community-oriented and sustainable organization. We will be considering virtually any idea. As we feel our way toward an uncertain but exciting future, we welcome thoughts from all our members and supporters.

In coming months, we will invite your ideas and comments on our unfolding plans. In the meantime, if you would like to be part of the process, let us know. One way is to visit our website www.oldyork.org to see our statement of themes in York's history and the strategic goals we have adopted, then share your reactions via email, telephone, or even pen and paper!

-- Scott Stevens, Executive Director