"Operational Sustainability: How Innovative Programming Can Strengthen and Sustain Historic Sites" Fall 2021 *Proceedings* of the Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums.

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Summary

Can your site develop new innovative operating models to move towards sustainability? Learn from three innovative examples from the new second edition of Donna Ann Harris's book, *New Solutions for House Museums: Ensuring the Long-Term Preservation of America's Historic Houses* (originally published by AltaMira Press; second edition published by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers/AASLH, 2020). These three examples illustrate how reprogramming for mission-based uses can strengthen a site's operational and financial sustainability and revitalize community life. We can find clues in the successful experiences of the Nantucket Historical Association's 1800 House, which rehabilitated a former house museum into a workshop space for Nantucket Island decorative arts and crafts; the Alice Paul Institute, serving as a leadership center for women and girls; and the Canal Quarters Program, offering immersive overnight experiences.

Introduction and Two Case Studies: 1800 House and Paulsdale (Donna Ann Harris)

I am an accidental author. I had been working in the historic preservation field as a preservation planner for about 25 years when I was awarded a Mid-Career Fellowship from the James Marston Fitch Charitable Trust in 2003. My project was to undertake research about alternative uses for historic house museums that could no longer be maintained and remain open to the public. I thought my research would lead me to writing one of those old Information Sheets that the National Trust used to put out for my final work product. However, the case studies that I wrote as research for the Fellowship were highly usable for historic sites looking for new options and alternatives. The historic sites that I profiled in case studies were organizations that had already made a change to a new user or use for their historic site. They became my first "Solutions" for house museums that "wanted sustainable solutions that honored their commitments to preserving the past"—through new users or uses of their historic house museums.[1]

When I was writing the first edition of my book in the early 2000s, there was a chorus of historic site colleagues concerned about what to do about all the house museums that were in disrepair, failing, or having serious deferred maintenance concerns. One article by Richard Moe, then president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, pointedly asked, "Are there too many

house museums?"[2] The main cause for concern was that so many house museums had aging Boards, and few new volunteers taking their place. In addition, there were many historic sites that had no endowments whatsoever and struggled along with serious deferred maintenance issues. My book came out in April 2007, just as the recession began. Talk about great timing!

What I learned from my interviews in 2003-5, and then again when I began work to update the book and the case studies for a second edition in 2019 and 2020, was what seemed to trip up most historic sites considering a transition to a new use or user, were the uncertainties surrounding deaccessioning collections contained in the house itself. The amount of money and time needed to go through a quality deaccessioning process just seemed too hard, too difficult and too expensive. And it cannot be done in secret.

Since the Great Recession of 2008, I found that many house museums took another route, and decided to reinvent themselves, which was a very good thing. I discovered during the Great Recession that there was not a barrage of sales of house museums or mergers. Certainly, there was change, and another book called *Reinventing the Historic House Museum: New Approaches and Proven Solutions,* edited by my friends Ken Turino and Max van Balgooy, captured many of the activities that these sites were undertaking as they reimagined their house museums.[3]

My publisher was interested in a new edition, now 12 years later, because it was their best seller! I had no idea. They asked me to talk to my contacts from each of the original 14 case studies to update them. They also wanted to ensure that the book included more diverse stories, so I added seven new case studies. I also added two more "solutions" for historic sites.

The three case studies that Heidi and I will profile in this article, all use the same "solution," one of the ten I identified in the book. I ended up calling this solution, "Reprogram for a mission-based use." For this "solution," the historic property does not get sold; rather, it remains in the inventory of the local history organization, is restored, and takes on a new use that is mission-based. This solution finds a financially viable alternative through adaptive use of the building.

All three case studies from the book merit more discussion, because these history organizations have made a deliberate decision to change the use of their historic house museum. All have found a better way forward for their historic site and their ultimate preservation mission to preserve and care for a landmark property.

These three case studies take former historic house museums—or historic sites that were never run as house museums—and use them for a whole variety of opportunities: staff housing, collections storage, libraries, the gift shop, a retail store, hospitality or lodging use, and a leadership center for women and girls.

I will focus on two of these extraordinary historic sites—the 1800 House in Nantucket, Massachusetts, and Paulsdale in Mt. Laurel New Jersey—while my colleague, Heidi Glatfelter Schlag, will discuss her work at the C&O Canal Trust.

1800 House, Nantucket Historical Association, Nantucket, Massachusetts

The first "reprogram for a mission-based use" solution is from Massachusetts (Fig. 1). The Nantucket Historical Association (NHA) is a longstanding history organization founded in 1898. This organization has been unafraid to embrace innovative solutions and new uses for some of its two dozen historic properties.

This case study examines how the Nantucket Historical Association created a new use for one of its former small historic house museums. The NHA had 25 historic properties in 2005 when I first visited them, and some of its properties had long been used as staff housing, collections storage, a library, a gift shop, or as a retail store.

At the 1800 House, the NHA closed the house museum because the building needed extensive repairs. The exterior was then restored and the interior rehabilitated for a new use as a workshop space for classes on Nantucket Island Decorative Arts and Crafts.

The NHA was very fortunate that a new and substantial local funding stream called the Community Preservation Act had just been enacted which enabled them to receive grant funds for restoration of this property.[4] Nantucket Island voters had just instituted a funding program, permitted by state legislation, which allowed municipalities to raise the real estate transfer tax by 1% in their community. These new funds were deposited into an account to be used for grants for open space preservation, workforce housing and historic preservation in the community.

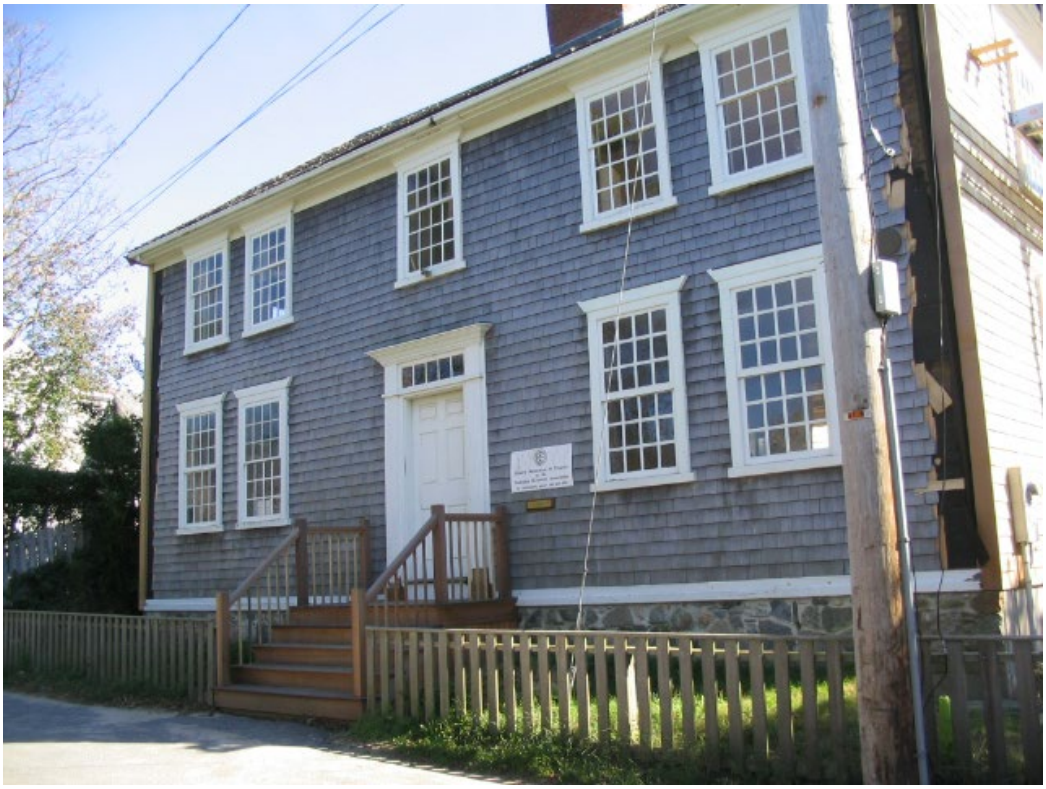

Fig. 1. 1800 House, owned by the Nantucket Historical Association. Photo by Donna Ann Harris.

The NHA received a grant of $337,000 from the first year of that new fund. This sizable grant, along with $250,000 that the Board allocated toward the 1800 House project from a capital campaign then underway for another project, jumpstarted the rehab work on the 1800 House. Other funds were raised, including $150,000 from a gift to the endowment specifically for this project, and another $150,000 raised specifically to fund the entire project. All told, the NHA was able to gather together the $887,000 needed for the interior and exterior restoration for this new lifelong learning center. The new use for the 1800 House, to teach Nantucket Island Decorative Arts and Crafts, began in 2004 and has been wildly successful over all these years.

Craftspeople and artisans instruct people who want to learn about scrimshaw, sailor valentines, floor cloths, textile arts and other local decorative arts throughout the spring, summer and fall seasons. At the 1800 House, the interior woodwork is restored, and the only furniture is movable tables and chairs. There is a small catering kitchen and handicapped restroom. Besides teaching crafts, this space can be rented for small meetings, book clubs for young and old, and Board meetings as needed.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NHA had to pivot like every other historic site. It began to offer instructional videos on its website for smaller crafts activities. Most of these are short, under 20 minutes, but others are longer. They provide activities that the craftspeople and

artisans would have taught in person at the 1800 House. There are a few in-person classes already scheduled at the property. When they have a larger group that can't fit at the 1800 House, the organization uses two other sites, the Whaling Museum and another former house museum, now rehabbed for multi-purpose use, called Greater Light.

The Nantucket Historical Association continues to review its inventory of historic sites. Over the last 12 years, it has bought and sold some historic sites. James Russell, NHA president, told me that all 22 historic properties it now owns are "undergoing a review by the NHA Board to determine if they are meeting the highest and best use" for this old and highly regarded history organization.[5]

I believe this opportunity—to re-think the use of a deteriorated historic site and transition to a much more expansive use for the community as a whole—has enormous potential for many historic sites.

Paulsdale, Alice Paul Institute, Mt. Laurel, New Jersey

The Alice Paul Birthplace (Paulsdale) in Mt. Laurel, New Jersey, is a ca. 1800 farmhouse (Fig. 2). It was once part of a larger farm, and is now located on six acres of land in the midst of a suburban subdivision.

In case you're unfamiliar with Alice Paul, she was a leading suffragist, and the author in 1923 of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Lucy Beard, the former Executive Director of the Alice Paul Institute, which owns the property, said that many don't know about Alice Paul because she was deliberately written out of the history of the suffragist movement in the US. This is because she pressed for a different tactic—a constitutional amendment—rather than the state-by-state method advocated by the leading suffragists for gaining women the right to vote.

Alice Paul was born in this house in 1885. She was raised as a Quaker and was highly educated. She had PhD degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and the London School of Economics.

She lived in London and Scotland in her twenties, and while there, learned about the organizing tactics used by the Pankhurst sisters to bring attention to the women's suffrage movement in Britain. Alice Paul was arrested three times while she was in England and Scotland, went on a hunger strike, and was force-fed in jail.

She came back to the US and began to work for the National American Woman's Suffrage Association as an organizer. Soon after, she founded the Congressional Union in 1913, when she broke with the national organization over their state-by-state approach for gaining the vote for women.

In 1917, she and her party began picketing in front of the White House seeking votes for women. They too were jailed, and force-fed, but public sentiment was changing. President

Woodrow Wilson eventually changed his position to finally support the 19th Amendment as a war effort. The 19th Amendment was enacted in 1920.

After the right to vote was secured, Alice Paul then began her work to add the ERA to the US Constitution. She wrote it in 1923 and rewrote the language of the proposed amendment in 1945 to reflect both the 15th and 19th Amendments to the US Constitution. The ERA reads, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on the account of sex."[6]

Alice Paul continued to advocate for this law, and the ERA passed both the House and Senate in 1972, which started the ten-year clock for 36 states to ratify. It failed in 1982 when only 35 of the 36 states needed had voted before the deadline. Alice Paul died in 1977 without seeing this amendment ratified.

In September 1989, Barbara Irvine, a New Jersey women's rights advocate and local preservationist, was approached by the private owner of the Paulsdale property about the possible purchase of the property. The family was thinking about retiring and they knew of the importance of Alice Paul and her life's work for gender equality.

Irvine had been part of a group that successfully raised about $25,000 to purchase Alice Paul's papers from a nephew in 1984. Her papers were deposited with the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College, which stewards these papers today. The owners of Paulsdale offered the Alice Paul organization a right of first refusal to purchase the property for $465,000, which was the appraised price of the property. They had one year to come up with full price to buy the birthplace.

After much work, Irvine and her followers were able to raise only $50,000 during that year towards the purchase price of the house. Irvine negotiated with many banks, but finally the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, offered the new group a 90% mortgage, and the property was theirs. This fledgling organization dutifully paid that mortgage each month for more than 10 years. Finally, in 2000, the property was paid off.

Fundraising continued as the organization applied for grants for exterior restoration and interior rehabilitation. All told, they spent more than $1.4 million on the property's restoration; most of the money came from 50/50 matching grants from the New Jersey Historic Trust.

In the meantime, the group was incorporated as the Alice Paul Institute (API), with a very specific idea about how they wanted to use the property. The API Board choose deliberately *not* to collect Alice Paul's furniture or papers for display here. Instead, their founder Barbara Irvine said, "We will return the exterior of the house to the way it looked when Alice Paul lived here. We will use period paint colors and wall coverings on the interior, but it will not be a museum. It's got to be a living, breathing place, perpetuating the things she stood for."[7]

The group of women who bought Paulsdale and created the Alice Paul Institute were not curators or preservationists. They were feminists who wanted to highlight Alice Paul and the ERA. They chose a nontraditional path for this site, and it was not easy going to say the least. Funders did not understand what they wanted to do with the old farmhouse. Others were outright hostile to their feminist agenda.

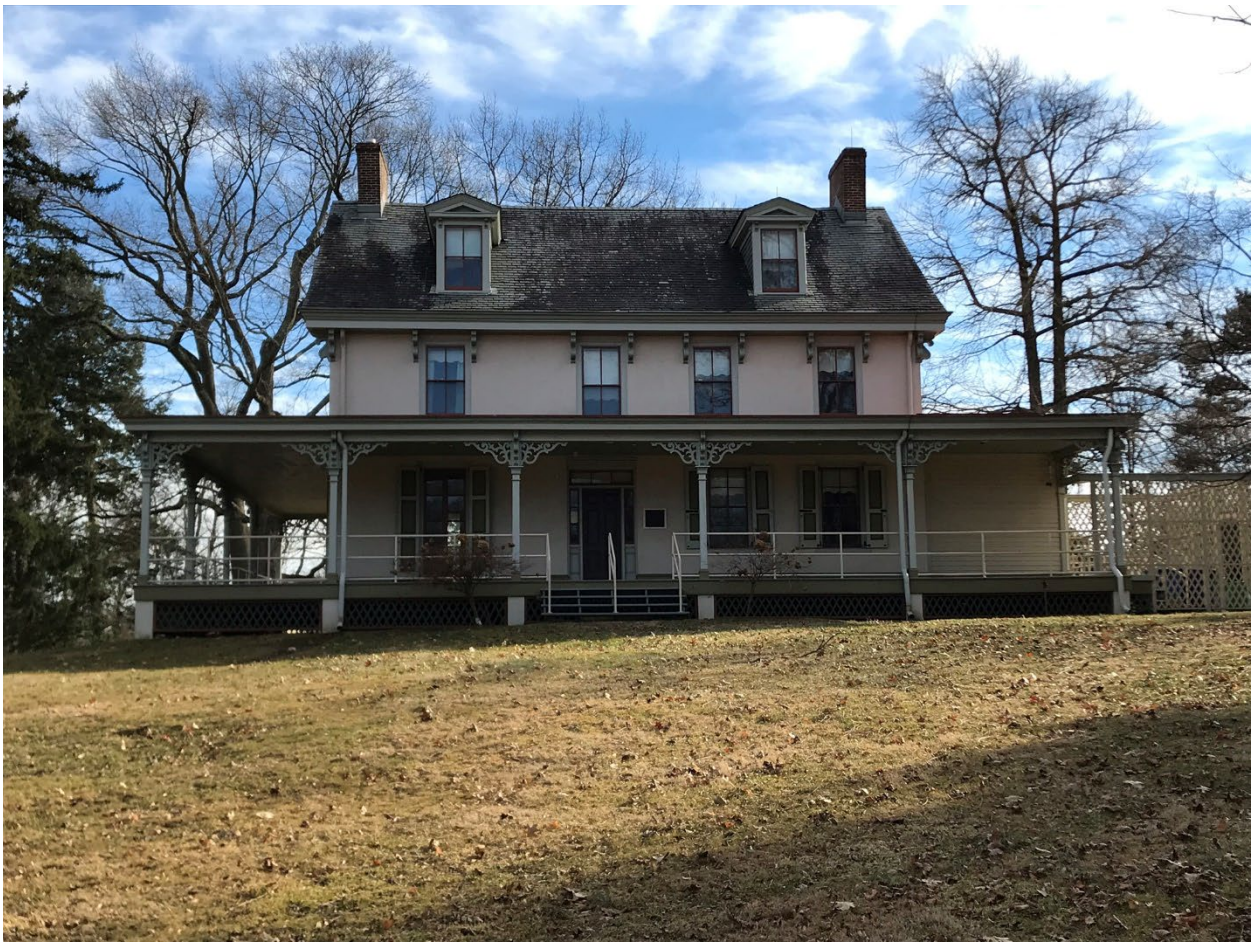

Fig 2. Paulsdale, the birthplace of Alice Paul, Mt. Laurel, New Jersey. Photo by Donna Ann Harris.

Soon after organizing, the API Board decided that their main focus would be on middle school girls. A great deal of academic literature had been published in the 1980s and 1990s about how middle school girls lose self-confidence as they reach puberty. The Alice Paul Institute would offer programs for young women to address these issues and provide leadership development training. The Alice Paul Institute has been offering this programming for more than 30 years. It has been highly successful in gathering educational grants for these programs and has attracted a very loyal following of career women who mentor these young women and provide

leadership classes, workshops on selecting a college, college visits for the students, and classes on writing scholarship applications and understanding student debt.

Where the Alice Paul Institute has been most successful is focusing its fundraising on individual donors. That has been its "secret sauce," if you will. Today, over 70% of its operating budget of $450,000 annually comes from individual donations—through annual gifts, fundraising events and smaller programs throughout the year. The Institute has built up an entire year's worth of operating funds in the bank too. It has finally started an endowment campaign. But this has taken 30 years. It has no mortgage now, has money in the bank, and raises more than 70% of its annual revenue from people—individuals—year in and year out. It uses its space as a touchstone for programs that live out Alice Paul's legacy.

Canal Quarters Program (Heidi Glatfelter Schlag)

The C&O Canal National Historical Park runs 184.5 miles along the Potomac River on the southern border of Maryland (Fig. 3). Stretching from Cumberland, Maryland, to Washington, D.C., the Park's towpath, where the mules once trod as they towed the canal barges up and down the waterway, now serves as a popular recreational trail for hikers and cyclists.

A part of the National Park Service since 1971, the C&O Canal National Historical Park is also preserved and protected by the C&O Canal Trust, the official nonprofit partner of the Park. The Trust's mission is to preserve resources, enhance the visitor experience, and cultivate stewards through fundraising and program management.

One of the Trust's flagship programs is the Canal Quarters program, which is creatively reusing seven historic lockhouses along the canal. Sixty-four lockhouses were built to house lock tenders during the Canal's heyday. By the late 2010s, only 27 lockhouses remained. To help preserve the extant structures, the Park and the Trust joined forces to implement an interpretive stay program that would preserve the lockhouses by allowing guests to use them.

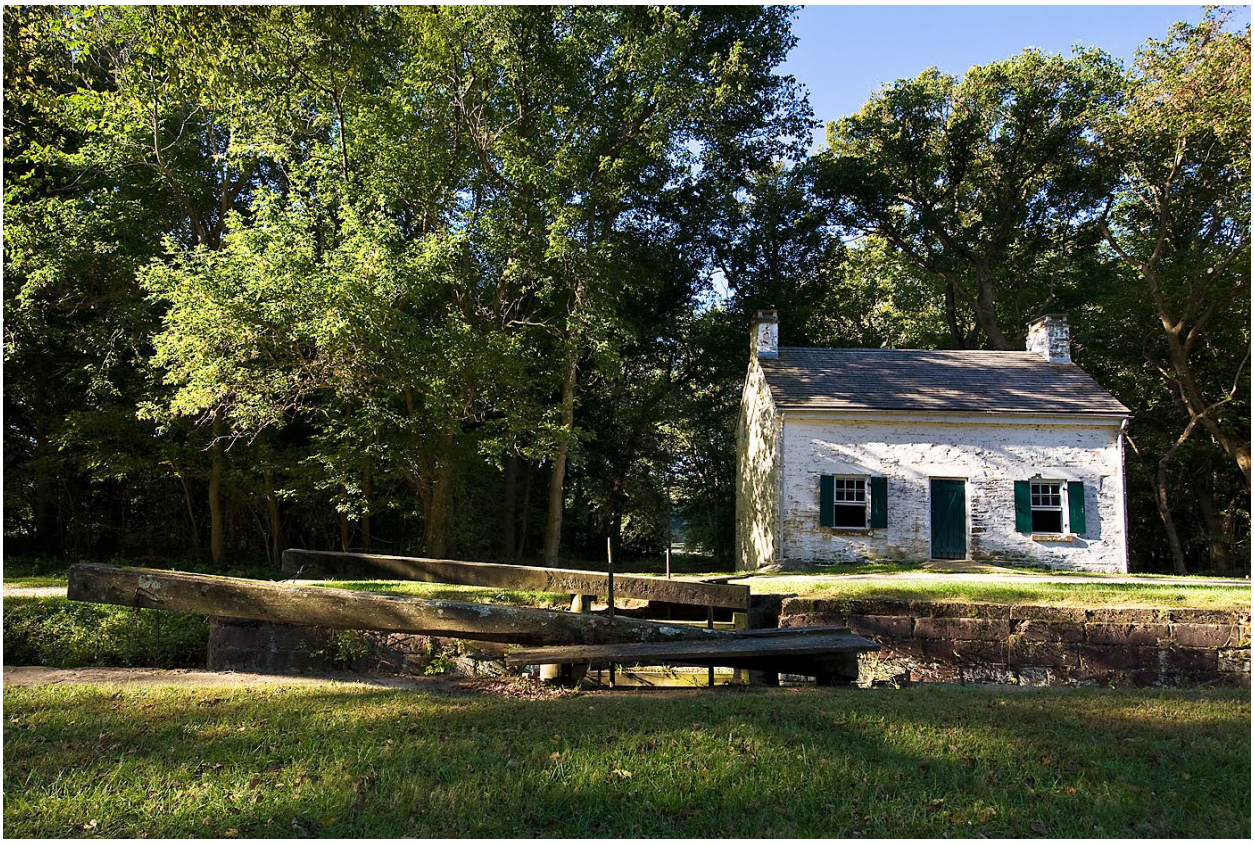

Fig 3. Lockhouse 22 in the C&O Canal National Historical Park. Photo courtesy C&O Canal Trust.

Six houses were chosen, based on their condition and location, to join the program. All of the lockhouses were then rehabilitated and made safe for occupancy. Three lockhouses are considered "rustic": they have no electricity or running water. However, they are all furnished with antiques of the 1830s to 1860s, with firepits outside and loads of charm (Fig. 4). Two lockhouses were rehabbed as "full amenity" spaces with A/C, heat, electricity, and full bathrooms and kitchens. The sixth house is a hybrid, with only electricity.

In 2019, after 12 years of success with the program, the C&O Canal Trust opened a seventh rehabbed lockhouse. Lockhouse 21, "Swains," is closely associated with the Swain family, whose ancestors helped build the canal, served as lock tenders, and ran a concession stand over the canal's nearly 200 years (Figs. 5 & 6).

Each home tells the story of a different period of the canal's history, with period furnishings joining interpretive materials like wall hangings, scrapbooks and hands-on activities.

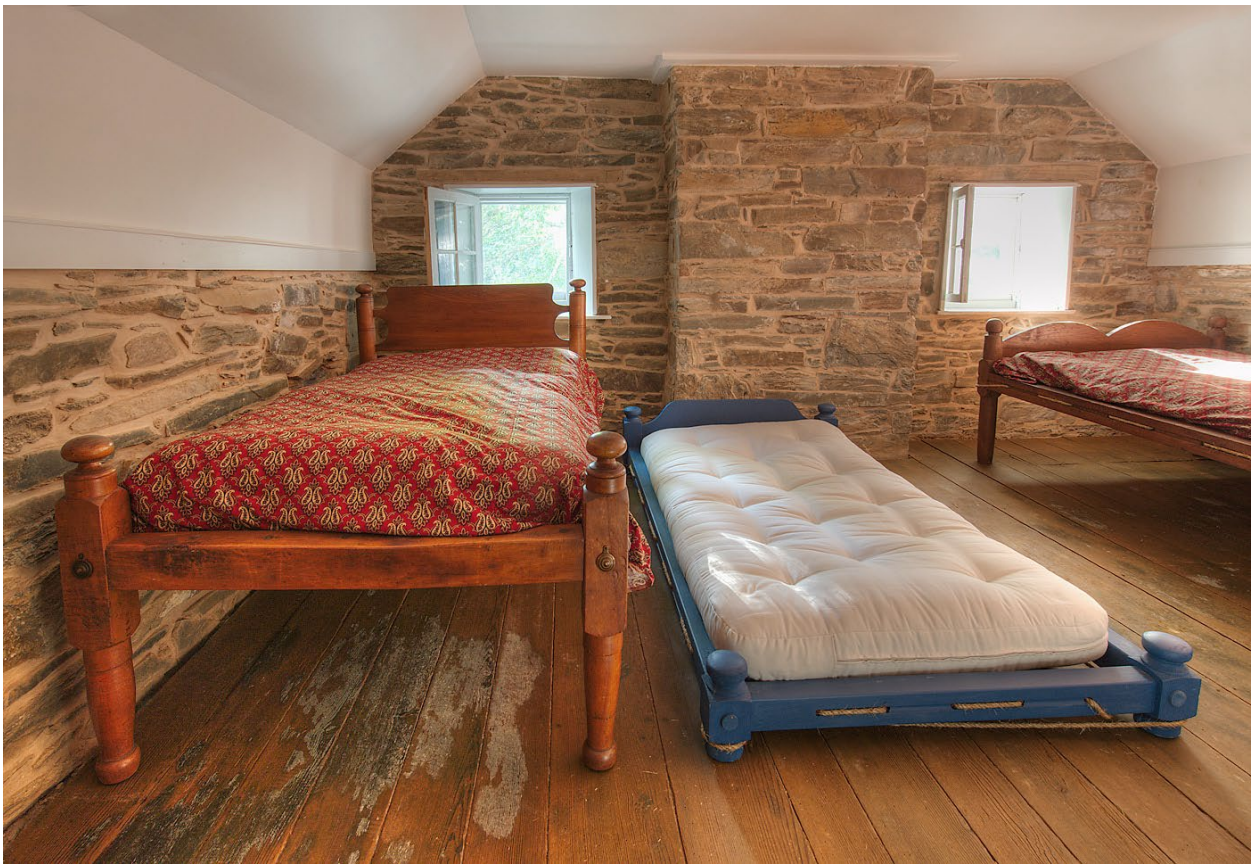

Fig 4.Reproduction beds inside Lockhouse 22. Photo courtesy C&O Canal Trust.

Rustic lockhouses:

Lockhouse 22:

Time period depicted: 1830s-1840s

Interpretive theme: The canal's engineering marvels

Lockhouse 25:

Time period depicted: 1860s

Interpretive theme: The canal's role in the Civil War

Lockhouse 28:

Time period depicted: 1830s

Interpretive theme: The race west between the C&O Canal and the B&O Railroad

Hybrid:

Lockhouse 49:

Time period depicted: 1920s

Interpretive theme: The story of Four Locks, a small canal community that is now gone.

Full Amenity lockhouses:

Lockhouse 6:

Time period depicted: 1950s

Interpretive theme: Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas's walk of the canal to prevent it from becoming a parkway.

Lockhouse 10:

Time period depicted: 1930s

Interpretive theme: African American Civilian Conservation Corps

Lockhouse 21:

Time period depicted: 1910s

Interpretive theme: The canal's transition from a transportation line to a recreational area

Some of the more unique interpretive items in the lockhouses include:

- Period playlists that can be downloaded and played through antique radios modified to work with mobile devices.
- The opportunity to "vote" in the 1916 Presidential election by dropping a marble into a bottle for Woodrow Wilson or Charles Evans Hughes.
- Period games like Dominoes, Lincoln Logs, and Pick-Up Sticks.
- Guest books where everyone leaves a message about their stay.

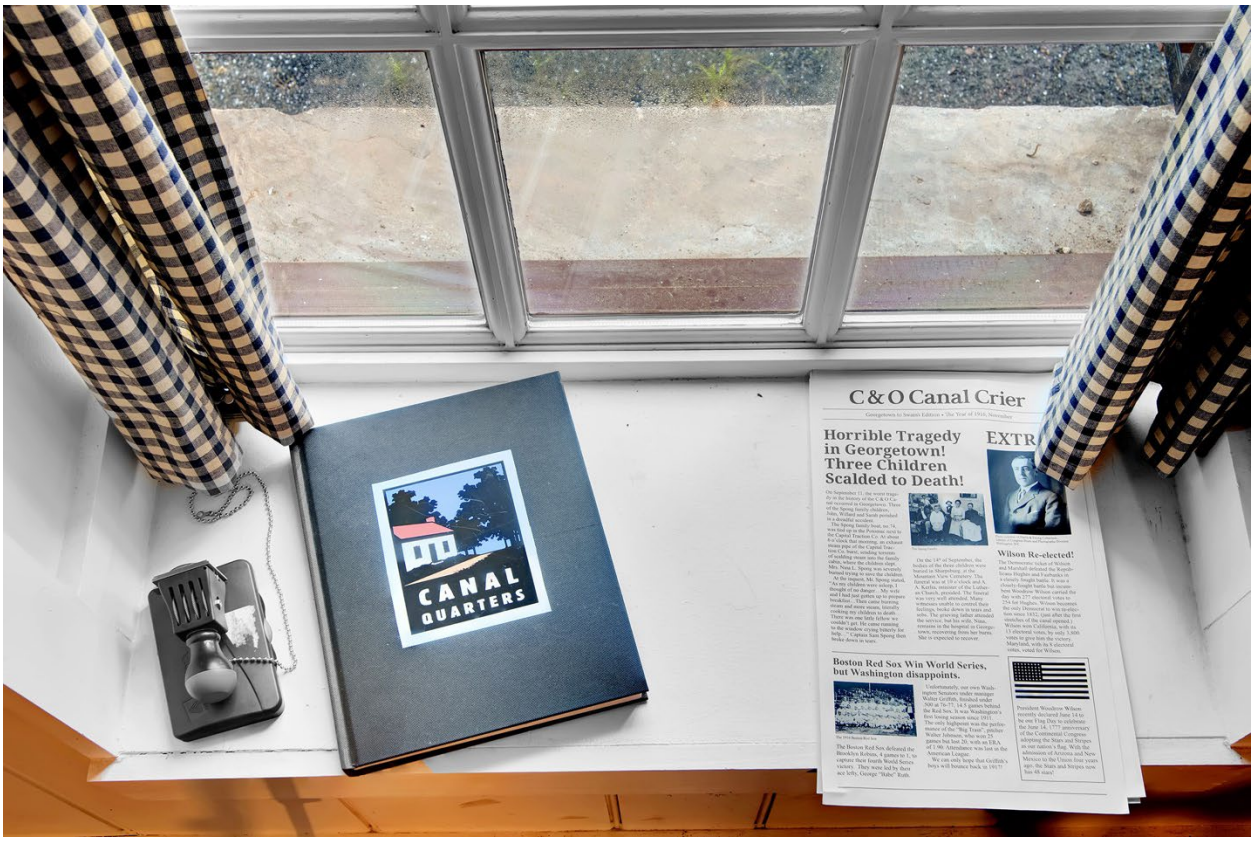

Fig 5. Swains Lockhouse 21 guest book and interpretive materials. Photo by Goodluckstef Productions, LLC.

Each home sleeps eight, making them less expensive than most hotels. All revenue from the program is re-invested back into the ongoing preservation of the lockhouses and the management of the Canal Quarters program. The current pricing for the program is as follows:

- Full amenities: $160/night
- Hybrid: $135/night
- Rustics: $110/night

Fees:

- Maintenance Fee: $20 – one time
- Occupancy Fee: $20 for groups of 6-8 – one time

The National Park Service, which maintains ownership of the lockhouses, is responsible for their upkeep. The Trust manages the day-to-day aspects of the program. Our staff includes:

- Program Coordinator: Manages most guest correspondence, coordinates with volunteers, does light maintenance work.

- Volunteer Quartermasters: Live near their lockhouse, visit between guests, help guests as needed.
- Director of Marketing and Communications: Markets program.
- Office Administrator: Handles customer service, reschedules, gift certificates.
- 24/7 Phone Line: Program Coordinator, Director of Programs, and Office Administrator monitor.

All reservations are managed through the Canal Trust's website (www.CanalQuarters.org), with a system that functions similarly to hotel reservation systems. Guests can select up to three nights for their stay, enter their contact and payment information, and have all registration documents e-mailed directly to them.

We are unaware of any other similar programs that use lockhouses in this manner. Because of the program's uniqueness, it has become a media darling, with features appearing in *AAA Magazine*, Fox 5 DC, NBC4, *National Parks Magazine*, and many more. This earned media is crucial to the program's success, as we only have a $9,000/year marketing budget.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, we closed the lockhouses for three months. Upon reopening, we began professional cleanings between guests. Previously, we had operated under a "leave it better than you found it" policy, but knew we had to provide better health precautions during this time. We also removed most interpretive materials that were not easy to disinfect, while replacing bed covers with plastic mattress covers that could be easily wiped off and providing disinfectant and cleaning supplies in the homes.

Our marketing campaigns began to promote the houses as safe, socially distant vacation opportunities in a National Park, where guests could recreate without coming into close contact with other people. Occupancy skyrocketed throughout the pandemic, nearly doubling our pre-

pandemic rates.

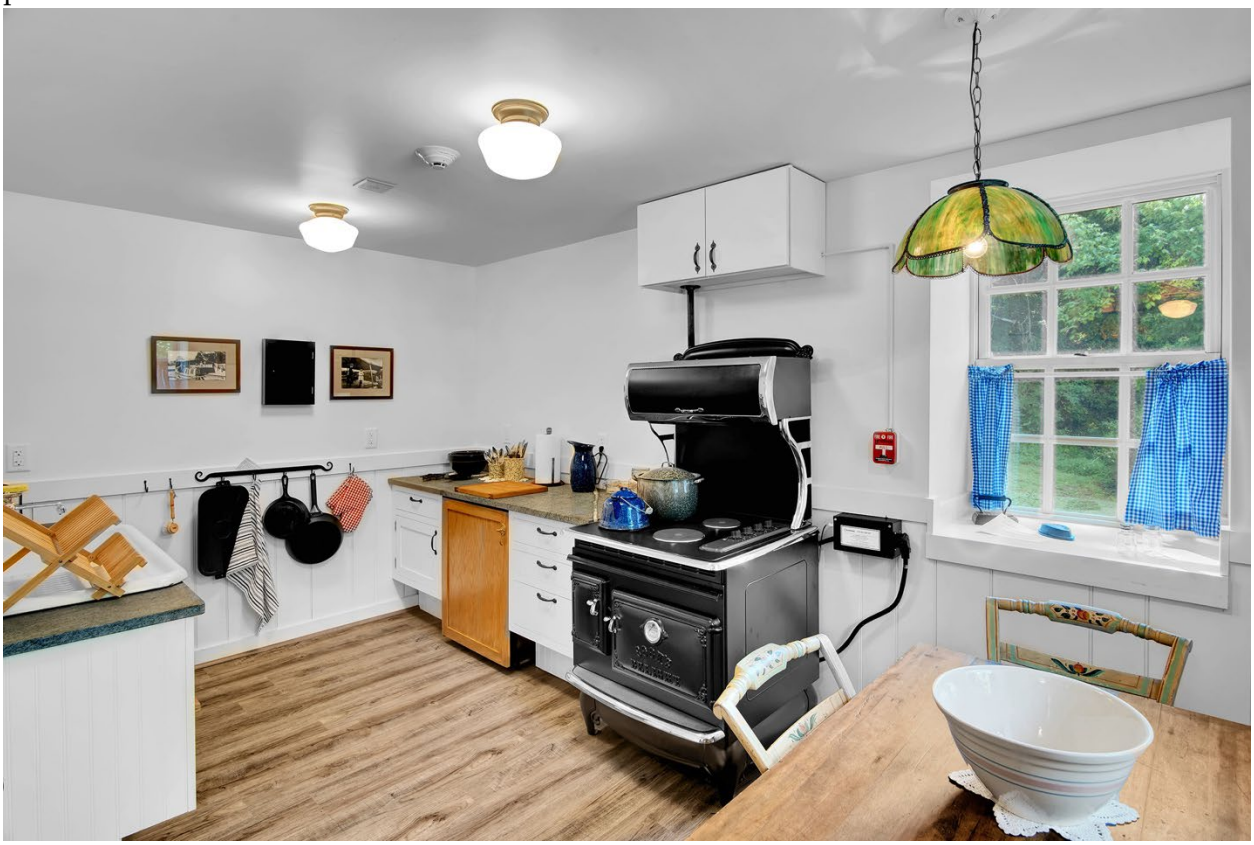

Fig 6. The kitchen in Lockhouse 21. Photo by Goodluckstef Productions, LLC.

Even as life returns to normal post-pandemic, the Canal Quarters program remains a popular way for people to experience "life as the lock keepers once lived." Additionally, multiple organizations have reached out to learn more about our operations, as it is a unique and sustainable way to preserve historic structures.

Summary and Conclusion

We hope that these three examples of historic sites that have programmed their properties with their broader preservation mission in mind will be helpful to you as you consider the future of your historic site.

The Nantucket Historical Association has had remarkable success with reuse of the 1800 House for a lifelong learning center where they teach Nantucket Island Arts and Crafts. These classes pay their way and provide a viable use for an old building.

At Paulsdale, deciding not to become a house museum created initial difficulties for the group of women preserving the Alice Paul Birthplace. Choosing to use the space as a leadership center

for women and girls has proven to be highly successful for them, because the majority of its supporters are women who care about its broader mission.

Finally, the Canal Quarters Program of the C&O Canal Trust has taken disused lockhouse buildings and turned them into an interpretive program that allows guests to stay overnight along the canal. This has been a financially successful solution for these small buildings.

If you want to dive deeper into these case studies or read about the 14 other historic sites profiled in *New Solutions for House Museums: Ensuring the Long-Term Preservation of America's Historic Homes*, please purchase the book from your local independent book retailer.

Notes

[1] Jane Becker, blurb on rear cover of Donna Ann Harris, *New Solutions for House Museums: Ensuring the Long-Term Preservation of America's Historic Houses*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020).

[2] Richard Moe, "Are There Too Many House Museums?" *Forum Journal* 16, no. 3 (2002): 4-11.

[3] Kenneth C. Turino and Max van Balgooy, eds., *Reinventing the Historic House Museum: New Approaches and Proven Solutions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019).

[4] Learn more about the Massachusetts Community Preservation Act at Chapter 44B (malegislature.gov); The Community Preservation Coalition serves as a clearinghouse for information about this important State statute. Learn more at Community Preservation Coalition |.

[5] Harris, *New Solutions for House Museums*, 2nd ed., 140.

[6] Alice Paul Institute, "The Equal Rights Amendment."

[7] Eve M. Kahn, "Group Seeks to Buy a Suffragist's Home," *New York Times*, July 13, 1989, http://nytimes.com/1989/07/12/garden/group-seeks-o-buy-a-suffrigists-home.html (accessed February 24, 2019).

6 photos

Fig. 1. 1800 House, Nantucket MA Photo credit Donna Ann Harris

Fig 2. Paulsdale, Mt. Laurel NJ Photo credit Donna Ann Harris

Fig. 3. Lockhouse 22 in the C&O Canal National Historical Park. Photo courtesy C&O Canal Trust.

Fig 4. Reproduction beds inside Lockhouse 22. Photo courtesy C&O Canal Trust.

Fig 5. Swains Lockhouse 21 guest book and interpretive materials. Photo by Goodluckstef Productions, LLC.

Fig 6. The kitchen in Lockhouse 21. Photo by Goodluckstef Productions, LLC.