

## SITE INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION



It is important that visitors to a historic resource understand the history of the resource, whether interpreted as a museum, in its original use, or rehabilitated for a new use. Interpretation improves the public appreciation and support of the resource. The visitor gains an understanding of how the resource came to be, its importance and unusual features, and why its preservation and maintenance are important. Interpretation can be a highly effective advocacy tool for a site and the organization that manages that site.

Site interpretation and public education opportunities should be considered and designed for the unique characteristics of each historic resource. They also should be coordinated with existing and planned heritage tourism goals of the site and community. One of the Historic Trust's initiatives for 2009 grants is the development of site interpretation. In addition to preserving New Jersey's historic resources, it is equally important to present these resources to the citizens and visitors to our state.

There are a variety of ways to present a historic resource or multiple sites so people can understand and learn from it. Examples of interactive activities include study tours, reenactments, demonstrations, interactive kiosks, archaeological digs, celebrations, and lectures.

The next step is presenting the historic resource so visitors can have satisfying experiences. These experiences can be emotional, physical, intellectual, or inspirational. A person's response and connection to the heritage resource is often the most important element in the long-term protection of the resource. Creating a positive, memorable response in visitors will translate to a positive response to preservation and history.

## **Types of Interpretation:**

Interpretation includes both written and interactive activities. Explaining a site and its history can be provided through various means, beyond signs and leaflets. Engaging visitors at a site will leave a more lasting impression than will handing them printed materials. Good interpretation engages visitors, stimulating and possibly even challenging them.

Site interpretation needs to be:

- Accessible and understandable
- Grounded in historical fact (authentic)
- Connect people to place
- Focused on protection and preservation
- Provide visitors with information and education
- Coordinated with other heritage tourism programs



The methods and materials for presenting the interpretation are diverse. The site might be interpreted through:

- An activity in which people enjoy the discovery of a place's unique identity derived from its history.
- Walks that include visits to a site or area's unique, indigenous culture, heritage, or natural beauty and features.
- Signage that places the resource in a broader historical contexts by linking it to other historic sites and districts in the community.

There are many projects which occur on site as part of the preservation of the historic resource that can include interpretive components such as; archaeological excavation, site mapping, photography, laboratory analysis, collecting oral histories, historic building restoration, library archival research, exhibit design, scavenger hunts for architectural details, and archaeological site monitoring.

The advent of modern technology enables new opportunities and possibilities for interpretation through internet, audio, and video accessibility. Audio tours can be provided on, and downloaded from, websites. COM casts, small-range radio broadcasts, and ADA accessible video interpretive displays are all new methods of interpretation.

## **Examples of Creative Site Interpretation Development in New Jersey:**

### **The Hermitage, Ho-Ho-Kus**

The Hermitage is an outstanding example of a mid-nineteenth century Tudor Gothic cottage villa, remodeled by architect William H. Ranlett in 1847-48. It also incorporates some of the walls and architectural fragments of a mid-eighteenth century house that was owned by American statesman Aaron Burr. The Hermitage provides educational programs to more than 13,500 visitors annually.

A Historic Trust grant has assisted the production of a preparation of the script for an orientation video. The video will ensure that people who are hearing-impaired or physically unable to access the second floor and other spaces open to the public, will have a complete visitor experience of the historic house museum. The video will also be presented in the visitor center as an orientation to the site and its history.

### **Hereford Lighthouse**

The Hereford Lighthouse (1874) is one of six known lighthouses commissioned by the U.S. Treasury's Light House Board, built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers between 1872 and 1875. The lighthouse is open 350 days per year and over the last three years attracted over 120,000 visitors. The Historic Trust has provided capital grants assisting the preservation of the structure.

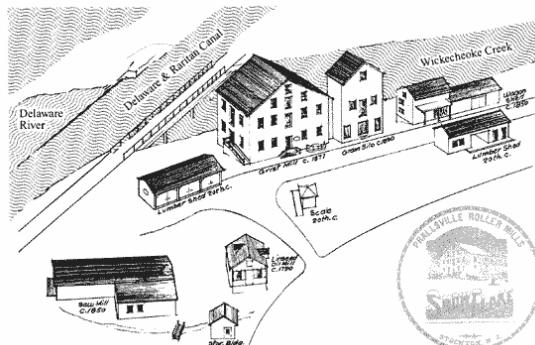
The organization recognized that providing barrier-free access into the lighthouse would compromise the character of the light. Instead, they created an accessible interpretation point on the site, outside the light. The interpretation point is paved for barrier free access and has clear views of the light and ocean.



## Prallsville Mill, Stockton

The Prallsville Mill complex dates to the early 1700s, and was a key component of this early industrial village. The site and a nearby stone quarry was owned by John Prall, Jr. from 1790 to 1831 and was later associated with the Delaware and Raritan Canal in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Acquired by the state in 1973.

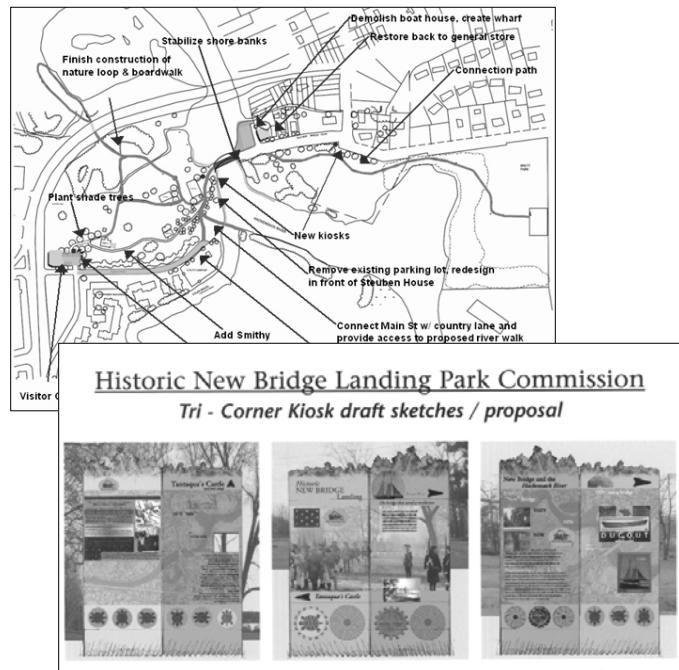
The Historic Trust funding assisted preparation of exterior site signage, interpreting both the canal and buildings on the site. The signs are coordinated with the paths and viewing points on the site.



## New Bridge Landing

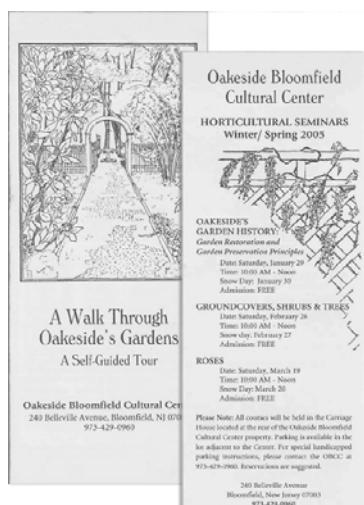
New Bridge Landing is significant for its association with the Revolutionary War battle fought at the site in 1776 and the location of a Native-American encampment. The park includes the Steuben House (a Dutch Colonial, brownstone house from 1713 with brick end gables), the Campbell-Christie House of 1774, the early-18th century Demarest House, the mid-19th century Westervelt Barn, and the foundation of a rare tidal mill.

A Historic Trust grant has funded the creation of a site management plan that will serve as a blueprint for the development of the site, examining site constraints and even environmental context. The plan includes assessing the site for opportunities for interpretation and presentation. Coordinated signage, trail markers, and paving was considered. Both sides of the Hackensack River, including land held by the State of New Jersey, Bergen County, Bergen County Historical Society, and the Township of Teaneck were included in the assessment.



## Oakeside Bloomfield Cultural Center

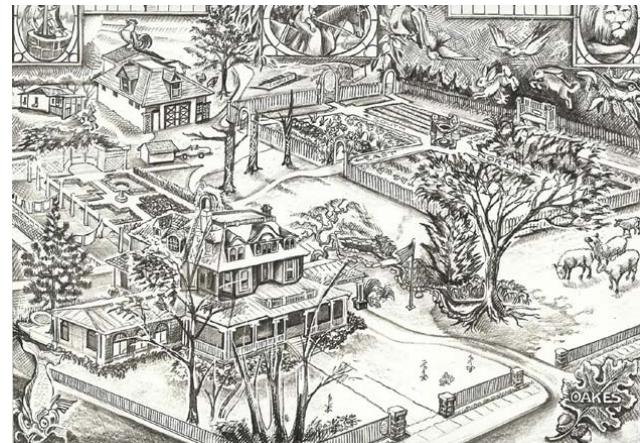
Oakeside was the home of the Oakes family, owners of the local textile factory and prominent citizens of Bloomfield. The house is a fine surviving example of a high style turn-of-the-century residence with formally landscaped Colonial Revival-style gardens and grounds that serve as a backdrop for numerous cultural events and horticultural learning activities.



As the garden's plant materials and period ornamentation were restored, the Historic Trust helped rehabilitate the Carriage House into a horticultural learning center, and expand the interpretation possibilities for the gardens at the site. The Historic Trust also helped fund the restoration of the exterior of the main house, the rose garden, and kitchen garden.

In 2001, the Historic Trust provided a grant for the preparation of a maintenance plan for the restored landscape, creation of horticultural workshops to foster community involvement in the gardens and school-appropriate interpretive materials about the history of the gardens.

Site interpretation for children is provided through children's tours, tactile activities (samples of architectural elements like snow guards, moldings, old light switches etc., that the children can touch), garden activities (including planting flowers and experiencing historic gardening tools), and a special children's' map of the site. Adult site interpretation is provided through docent tours, a slide show of "before" and "after" images of the house and grounds, art classes, a garden lecture series, and hands-on workdays in the garden.



## **What the Historic Trust Funds for Site Interpretation:**

There are a variety of ways to interpret a historic resource or community so people can understand and learn from it. To be part of a Trust grant, the interpretation improvements must be a new project, must be quantifiable, professionally guided, and able to be completed within the time frame of the grant.



**New project:** The interpretation must expand an existing program or create a new form of interpretation for the resource. The continuation of existing programs or replacement (or reprinting) of existing interpretive materials will not be funded.

**Quantifiable:** The project must be clearly defined from other programs and projects. It must either have clear start and end dates, or create a distinct object or report. The project is to be defined through a proposal to the grantee, establishing the parameters and costs associated with the project.

**Professionally guided:** A consultant and possibly crafts people are to oversee and undertake the project. The project cannot be undertaken in house. The consultants hired may include writers, sign makers, video producer, historic preservationist, tourism consultant, or team of many consultants, depending on the nature of the project and expertise need to implement it.

**Completed within the time frame of the grant:** The Trust grant has a work period end date, as well as grant agreement end date. Any exercises for which the grant will assist must be completed before the work period end date. All expenses for the exercise must be reconciled and evidence of payments provided to the Trust through a Reimbursement Request (see section “Administering an Open Grant”), before the grant end date.

Examples of interactive mechanism that could be used as interpretive exercises are study tours, interactive kiosks, archaeological digs, demonstrations, and lectures. Regardless of the mechanism, the interpretation must be professional, engage the visitor, and accurately present the history of the resource. Creating a positive, professional, and memorable response for visitors will translate to a positive response to the significance and preservation of the resource.

There are ways to include structured, volunteer participation, as part of public education. The volunteers learn about scientific methods and theory, and the history and prehistory of the area, while participating in projects. However, the Trust is encouraging **interpretative exercises that are permanent** with a physical product; otherwise the exercise is not fundable.

## **Historic Trust Funding Requirements for Interpretive Exercises:**

**Consultant:** The planning and installation of the interpretive elements must be guided by a professional consultant with relevant past experience. The consultant is selected by the grantee, as proposed to and approved by the Historic Trust. Please provide the Trust information on the consultants relevant past experience and proposal for interpretation for your resource. The Trust will then, if part of the grant funded project, incorporate the interpretive exercise in the Grant Agreement's Scope of Work.

**Draft Work Product:** The Grantee is required to submit a draft plan of the interpretive exercise. The draft plan should be sufficiently complete to allow for meaningful review by the Trust. This draft plan may be prepared as a proposal by the consultant. The Trust will review the proposed plan and provide the Grantee with any written comments.

**Implementation:** The Grantee can then engage the consultant in the preparation of the interpretive exercise. As part of interim reports and updates to the Trust, keep the Trust informed on the progress of the exercise and any changes from the initial exercise as presented in the consultant's proposal. If the interpretive project includes signage or printed materials, the materials must acknowledge the Trust funding.

**Final Report:** The Final Report is to be submitted before the Work Period End Date of the Grant Agreement. The Trust will review the submissions and provide the Grantee with written comments on the final interpretive elements.

