A Case Study: The Historic House Museum Transformed

Villa Finale: Museum & Gardens
San Antonio, TX

JANE LEWIS – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
INTRODUCTION TO
VILLA FINALE: MUSEUM
& GARDENS
Villa Finale: Museum & Gardens
Located in the
King William Historic District
Bequeathed by Walter Nold Mathis
The Only National Trust for Historic Preservation Site in Texas
Home to 20% of the National Trust for Historic Preservation Collections
Library
Green Bedroom
OUT WITH THE OLD,
IN WITH THE NEW
Former State (2010 - 2012)

- Called a “Mausoleum” or “Rest Home”
- Guided Tours Only
- Identity was “Walter’s House”
Interim State (2012 - 2014)

- Grounds Opened to the Public
- Expanded Tours to Include Self-Guided
- Visitor Center Moved to Carriage House
Enhanced Programs & Activities
Establishment of Annual Signature Events
Locally Recognized and Supported
Current State (2017-2019)

- Managed by New 501c3 Board of Directors
- Focus on Decorative & Fine Art Collection
- Running Track Record of Profitability
Future State (2020 - )

- Community Resource
- Preservation Heritage Program
- Expansion of Operations
REIMAGINING AN HISTORIC SITE
A Vision for National Trust Sites

National Trust Sites are places of national significance or impact where a variety of ownership, stewardship, business, use, and engagement practices flourish to advance the National Trust mission and model the many options for preservation.
A Vision for
National Trust Historic Sites

Significance & Impact Nationally

Model a Variety of Preservation Options

Alignment with the National Trust Mission

Governance Locally

Financially Self-Sufficient

Alignment with the National Trust Mission
National Trust Historic Sites

[Map of North America showing various historic sites and their names, such as Farnsworth House, Brucemore, Hotel de Paris Museum, and others.]
21st Century House Museum

- Aligns with mission of the National Trust
- Primary focus is a museum
- Offers a variety of cutting-edge educational programs
- Engages in preservation issues outside of the site
- Expands outreach through online tools
- Exhibits a range of 21st century best practices in collections curation, education and stewardship
KEEP YOUR COMPETITORS CLOSE: COLLABORATE
Expand Audience Base with Partners
Neighborhood Associations and Activities
University Historic Preservation Programs
“KWAK’s” Easter Egg Hunt
“Fotoseptiembre: Somos San Antonio”
Other Cultural Institutions
“Musical Soiree”
Partner: ICAA
Museum Collection Loan Programs
University Press Publications
Book Signings
Collections on Exhibit Off-Site
Artist Work on Exhibit On-Site
YOU SAY DIVERSITY;
I SAY DIVERSIFY
You Say Diversity; I Say Diversify

Interest Specific Workshops (Collections Based)
Quilt Workshop
“Music for Your Eyes” Tour
Even “Creepy” Objects Can Be Used
Age Specific Programs & Events ("After Dark," too)
Kids’ Composting Workshop
“Drawing From Experience”
Silver Screen Classics in the Garden

“NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD”

Bring your lawn chairs, picnics & pets on leash for a terrifyingly good time on the grounds of Villa Finale!

10.28.16

Opens: 6:00pm; Raffle & zombie costume prize: 6:45pm; Film: 7:00pm

Outdoor Movie Night
Wine Tastings
Billy Keilman’s “Speakeasy”
“Speakeasy” Basement
Ethnic/Cultural Programs & Events
“Musica Folklorica” Dancers
“Fiesta” Order of the Alamo Exhibit
Musical Performances
“Discomfort” Zones
“Cervecberos”
Home Brew Exhibition & Tasting
IDENTITY CRISIS:
SIGNATURE PROGRAMS
Identity Crisis: Signature Programs

Melodie and Opera Arias
A French Parlor Concert

Music Series
Identity Crisis: Signature Programs

Power of a Dream Lecture Series
Professor and Architect William Dupont
Thursday, March 22, 2016
6:00pm - 7:30pm
Villa Finale Napoleon Parlors
$30.00 general admission
Refreshments included

“Power of a . . . . . .” Lecture Series
“Spooktacular” / Scavenger Hunt for Children
“Spooktacular”
Fiesta “Members Retreat”
“Members Retreat”
Fiesta 2014

Jane — a great Fiesta — Thanks for your leadership
Hoyd Daggett
2014
Christmas Holiday Program / Open House
“A Christmas Carol”
CRÈME DE LA CRÈME: SUSTAINABILITY
Crème de la Crème: Sustainability

Fundraisers/Galas with a “Twist”
Opening Celebration
Gala 2010
“Look South”
Gala 2012
“La Fete Napoleon”
Gala 2014
“Moonlight at Villa Finale”
Gala 2016
“Moonlight at Villa Finale”
Gala 2016
Memberships / “Friends” Campaign
“Vanilla Finale”
Members Reception
People: Board / Staff / Volunteers
Volunteers
Staff Continuing Education
Volunteer Appreciation
Site Stewardship:  “Use It, or Lose It”
Family Get-Togethers & Events
Wedding Photos / Costume Exhibits
Free Evening Programs/Events

Villa Finale Museum & Gardens
A National Trust Historic Site
401 King William Street
(210) 223-9606
VillaFinale.org
Find us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram!

Family Night
Our Story
Your Story
A Fun Activity for Kids & Their Families
Guest Speakers
“High Tea” to “Earthworms”
Engaging a Cultural Continuum: The House Museum Transformed

• Out with the Old, In with the New
• Keep Your Competitors Close: Collaborate
• You Say Diversity; I Say Diversify
• Identity Crisis: Signature Programs
• Crème de la Crème: Sustainability
• PARTNER with Like Organizations
The Edward Steves Homestead
• Owned by the San Antonio Conservation Society
• Built in 1876 for the founders of the Steves Lumber Company
• Donated to the Society by the Steves Family in 1952
• Became an historic house museum in 1954
• The Steves family lived in the house for 53 years
• Furnishings reflect the lifestyle of this prominent family
• House is interpreted to the 1880’s / Victorian period
• Furnishings include pieces owned by the Steves family
• Other objects represent the period and were donated by members of the Conservation Society
• Features include recreated historic kitchen
• Site has original outbuildings (first natatorium in San Antonio, carriage house, laundry building, servant quarters)
• Extensive landscaped grounds along the banks of the San Antonio River
• Formal gardens front the property along King William Street
New Interpretation of Homestead

• Life in the Victorian Era
  – Relive the past!
  – What character are you playing?
  – What experience are you having?

• Architecture
  – What style of design is the house?
  – Who was the architect?
  – Why was it built in King William?
  – What does the house say about the owners?

• Grounds
  – Who used the grounds?
  – What activities took place here?
  – How were they landscaped?
  – Where did the water come from?
New Interpretation of Homestead

• The Family Parlor
  – What were indoor leisure activities?
  – Who would play the upright piano?
  – What board games were popular?
  – How was the family parlor furnished?

• The Formal Parlor
  – What is a formal parlor?
  – Who used the formal parlors?
  – How would they be decorated?
  – What events took place in them?
New Interpretation of Homestead

• Dining Room
  – Who ate in the dining room?
  – What types of food were eaten?
  – Which meals were taken here?
  – Who served the food?
  – What table manners were used?
  – How did you dress for dinner?

• Kitchen
  – Who did the cooking?
  – What utensils were used?
  – How were foods prepared?
  – What happened to leftovers?
  – How were the servants treated?
New Interpretation of Homestead

- **Interior Decoration**
  - What style décor is used?
  - Who did the decorating?
  - Where did the furnishings come from?
  - What does it say about the family?
  - Who did the cleaning?

- **Upstairs Bedroom**
  - Who used the bedrooms?
  - How were they decorated?
  - What bedclothes were worn?
  - How were they heated/cooled?
  - What were the private dynamics of the family like?
New Interpretation of Homestead

- **Historic Carriages**
  - Who rode in them?
  - Who drove them?
  - Who maintained them?
  - How were they stored?

- **Laundry Building**
  - Who did the wash?
  - What items were worn, by whom?
  - How were they cleaned, cared for?
  - Where was the laundry building?
New Interpretation of Homestead

• The Steves Family
  – Who were the Edward Steves?
  – How many children in the family?
  – When did they move to San Antonio?
  – Why did they choose to live in King William?
  – What activities did the family members engage in?

• Family History
  – What was Edward Steves’ business?
  – How is it reflected in the Homestead?
  – Were other family members involved in the business?
  – How did it impact the family lifestyle?
New Interpretation of Homestead

• A Victorian Era
  – Why is it called “Victorian”?  
  – What were prevalent fashions?  
  – Were there any social changes?  
  – How did the Steves reflect this era?

• King William Historic District
  – Why is it called King William?  
  – Who built the houses here?  
  – What attracted people to this place?  
  – What impact did the Steves family have on the neighborhood?
The Edward Steves Homestead

*Relive the Past . . . . . .*

**Villa Finale: Museum & Gardens**

*Experience the Beauty . . . . . .*
TAKE-AWAY

Food for Thought
Audience Engagement

• At your site, do you educate or entertain?
• What was your most successful event? Why?
• What do you want to do that you think you can’t do?
• Why do you work at your site?
• How will you successfully engage new audiences?
• Methodologies include storytelling, new tour content and improving existing programs
• See your museum as a visitor would – as a center for community interaction, a place where they truly connect to the collection, and a place for fun! Such as…

* Add-on team building
* Develop amazingly fun tours
* Consider birthday parties for groups
Museum Hack

• “Hack” – A clever solution to a tricky problem (to hack is to modify or change something in an extraordinary way)

• A group of renegade tour guides & experience consultants

• Create non-traditional, highly interactive, intimate museum experiences

• Work with other museums to develop programs that engage and retain new audiences and donors

• Fight “museum fatigue” by creating informative and meaningful museum experiences for everyone
**Methodology**

- Engaging participants with the space and collection
- Adult playtime -- being reverently irreverent
- “A monotone lecture is a totally bankrupt idea for millennials”
- “Today’s audiences have to be entertained before they can be educated”
- Create interactive and inquiry-based games that utilize technology and the audience’s expertise
- Don’t be afraid to gossip – tell fascinating stories about your site and collections from a place of personal connection and passion
- Great stories create memorable experiences and start a viral loop as visitors share them with others
Sassy stories, juicy gossip, activities in the galleries & fun photos with art... 

This Isn't Your Grandma's Museum Tour
Engaging Millennials

• In 2012 only 13% of museum visitors were between the ages of 18-24
• The only segment of visitation that increased between 2002-2012 were the elderly guests
• Millennials have overtaken Baby Boomers as America’s largest generation

• Activities for Millennials must be made personal through structured and tiered activities:
  – Low exposure (not personally threatening)
  – Medium exposure (requires personal engagement)
  – High exposure (most personal and open to risk)

• Instructions must be specific and precise
• Example: “Buy, Steal or Burn”
Reinventing Tours

• At your site, are you going to educate or entertain?
• What stories are you going to tell?
• How will you be reverently irreverent?
• What kind of a social experience will you design?
• Will you create a sense of exclusivity and VIP?

• Goals of a reinvented tour:
  –Have a terrific time (and give guests a few learning points in the process)
  –Cause your guests to feel like a team of friends
  –Make the museum the star of the show
Thank You & You’re Welcome!

• Thank You!
  – I appreciate the opportunity to share some ways to transform an historic site.

• You’re Welcome!
  – I invite you to visit both historic sites in San Antonio: Villa Finale and the Edward Steves Homestead.
Contacts!

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