
Robert M. Lunny

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TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE
SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON ARTS AND HUMANITIES

JULY 19, 1973
BY
ROBERT H. LUNNY

I am Director of The New Jersey Historical Society, the headquarters of which is located in Newark, New Jersey. There are approximately 2100 adult members, 1100 student members, 140 school members and 75 corporate members. The purpose of this private society is to further interest in and knowledge of New Jersey history.
TESTIMONY

JULY 19, 1973

Senator Pell and members of the Subcommittee on Arts and Humanities, the opportunity to appear before your committee as a representative of The New Jersey Historical Society to testify on behalf of the Museum Services Act, S 796, is greatly appreciated. It is particularly so at this time when the Society is about to reopen its renovated headquarters in Newark.

Through the generous gifts of members, trustees and friends - individual and corporate - and aided by substantial grants from foundations and one from the National Endowment for the Arts, the 42-year-old building, constructed for our purposes, has been brought up to date with temperature and humidity control, other improvements and modern equipment at a cost of three quarters of a million dollars. With the new facilities, the Society now looks forward to establishing a far more effective museum program for far greater numbers than ever before.

Founded in 1845 as a private, non-profit organization, The New Jersey Historical Society still derives practically all of its support from private sources, like the other old-line societies along the Atlantic seaboard.

In 1845 and for many years thereafter, interest centered on collecting library materials, especially those pertaining to the colonial period of the state's history. A publications program was similarly oriented. As time passed, however, the Society also acquired portraits, landscapes and fine furniture, mainly through gifts, among the first of which was a Gilbert Stuart portrait of Aaron Burr. These pieces composed the "cabinet," as the Museum was then called, which for years was incidental to the Library and the publications of the institution. But now both our Library and Museum
collections have grown to become the largest and most important anywhere devoted exclusively to New Jersey history. They are essential sources for any researcher specializing in this field of American history.

In 1931 the Society moved into its present home, after conducting a building campaign initiated - fatefuly - in January of 1929. This fine headquarters, especially designed for the Society's purpose, houses the Society's four substantive operations: the Museum, the Library and the Publications and Education departments. We are especially concerned here with the Museum and its relationship to the other three departments.

Twenty years later - in 1950 - the trustees of the Society, recognizing that they could no longer continue the restricted activity of decades past if the Society was to become a truly statewide historical society, invited Dr. Edward P. Alexander, past Vice President of Colonial Williamsburg, to survey the entire organization and recommend the direction it should take. One result among many was the appointment of the first professional director; another was the broadening of its appeal by holding popular annual historical conferences in conjunction with local societies throughout the state.

These additional activities would strengthen and translate into meaningful action the purposes set forth by the founders in the Society's constitution of 1845:

"... to discover, procure and preserve whatever relates to any department of the history of New Jersey, natural, civil, literary or ecclesiastical; and generally of other portions of the United States."

The new policy also embraced the dissemination of the Society's accumulated knowledge and interpretation of its collections to all citizens: the scholar, the layman and the school child.
The historical museum is one link with our past, and a great teacher. Nothing appeals more to man than to be recognized as a part of a group, both past and present. Especially in these difficult times, establishing and recognizing the roots and ties of all people is of greatest importance. Museums can play a decisive role in this effort.

The trustees of the Society, considering further how best to serve the public, made two important decisions. One was to continue Society headquarters on in Newark. The other was to renovate this fine building to make it more efficient. That first period of recognition of greater responsibility is just now culminating in completion of the modernization of our headquarters, a four-story structure of which two-and-a-half stories are devoted to museum galleries, study rooms, storage areas, offices, and workrooms.

As to its physical plant and equipment the museum is adequately served. Its collections can be properly stored. They can be researched by scholars and staff in new study rooms. They can be exhibited far more attractively in newly panelled exhibition galleries under fine lighting. The Society now has physical facilities leaving little if anything to be desired.

The late Katherine Coffey, for years the distinguished director of The Newark Museum, was serving briefly until her death as museum consultant to the Society. Regarding the renovation, Miss Coffey remarked that the Society has a handsome shell for its Museum; it must now have an equally fine and effective museum program.

One further element to put on a truly fine program is yet to be added: sufficient professionally trained personnel to mount a vigorous museum program, using the museum collections to promote further interest and knowledge of New Jersey history. The present staff of the Museum is woefully inadequate in number. The Society's hopes for its museum are not limited as to ideas,
plans and goals. The hopes are limited only by lack of professional personnel. The lack of professional personnel is limited only by lack of funds. This inadequacy we hope can in some measure be filled by the Museum Services Act.

What could our Museum program be if this department were adequately staffed? These next few years the American historical museum will naturally be busier than ever mounting exhibitions in celebration of the Bicentennial of Independence.

The New Jersey Historical Society, joining forces with the New Jersey Historical Commission and the New Jersey State Museum will produce "New Jersey during the Revolution," to be taken to seven areas covering the entire state, being shown in museums and colleges, if funds are forthcoming. The Society Museum will also have a series of exhibits - small, medium and large - through these next few years on subjects to be selected from an already prepared list of persons, events, places and ideas showing New Jersey's contribution to the founding of the U.S.A.

Other shows we hope to produce soon, if funds can be obtained, include "Water in New Jersey History," a rather different approach to history, drawing upon both Library and Museum collections. Others include a series of exchange exhibitions with county and local society museums to show their collections dealing with their areas at our Museum while we show appropriate collections of our own in theirs. Another series of special exhibitions designed to travel will be on various ethnic groups such as Russian, Portuguese and Black people from our own South. Each of these shows would be available for showing in churches and public halls in sections of cities where such groups predominate.

Too often the historical museum shows in period rooms or house museums little more than the decorative arts favored by the upper classes of a particular time.
We are intent on presenting exhibits illustrating all important aspects of New Jersey history and its place in our national history. Development and achievements in commerce and industry, arts and the sciences, religion and education, rise of the city and its problems, the automobile and the still burgeoning suburbs; the ocean, the littoral and inland waters and man's regard for them in the past and at present, can be shown to illustrate historical development in New Jersey in its different aspects.

The museum of an historical society especially is expected to publish not only the usual check list or illustrated catalogue of an exhibition but a carefully researched, written and edited piece, making a contribution of permanent interest and value on the subject. We have, for example, 100 drawings each by Robert Fulton and Benjamin Henry Latrobe. Neither of these collections has yet been shown in toto and neither has been published, yet one represents a substantial contribution to American science in canal construction, the other in waterworks. Another publication which should be brought out under museum auspices is the iconography of New Jersey, a catalogue of over 4000 known views of the State in paintings, drawings and prints dating from 1626 to 1876, located in our own and other collections here and abroad. If this book were published now, it would be the first iconography of any state in the Union.

Museums should not attempt to be social service agencies or institutions of social reform. They can, however, without departing from their legitimate purposes, contribute substantially towards an enriched life for those who visit them whatever their background. Children especially are receptive to a fine exhibition, well presented and interpreted, or to its introduction by audio-visual means into their classrooms, responding with wonder, surprise and delight to a new experience in learning. Such a stimulus can stretch their minds and imaginations, carrying them beyond their immediate surroundings.
Again, if funds become available, we propose to initiate as an experiment two thirteen-hour adult courses in New Jersey history, one a brief survey, the other on selected subjects such as paintings and painters, medicine and physicians, state government and legislators. Each would consist of lectures, readings and the use of source materials in the Library and Museum. If well received, they could be produced for television.

These are but some of the ways the public could come to know and appreciate the historical museum. However, much else on which these exhibitions and programs are based must be done behind the scenes. Caring for the collections by compiling and keeping complete records; doing the extensive research required; conducting a conservation program of paintings, prints and drawings; planning the exhibitions and publishing the catalogues - all these and myriad others are enough to keep a large staff busy. And yet, a museum operated by an historical society is often less adequately staffed than any other type museum. The reason is clear. Such an institution is busy operating a museum and also a library, a publishing house, both book and periodical and education and special events departments. Its financial resources must stretch over all these operations, a requirement increasingly difficult to manage under present conditions.

Each society must continue to derive from its present sources of support the fullest measure possible. Each must seek new sources. The society can only gain for its museum the increasingly large support it will require by concentrating on the expert preparation of its appeals to private donors, foundations, corporations and public funding agencies. These appeals must be based on the conviction that the historical museum is an important element in the preservation and development of American civilization. Given adequate support the historical museum can become a vigorous and growing cultural force.
1. Museum services to the public.

a) Attendance levels and growth:

Headquarters has been closed for renovation since April 1972. Yearly average had reached 10,000 and was increasing gradually.

b) School groups attending the museum and utilizing its resources:

Elementary, junior and senior high school students.

c) School age level of museum audience in organized tours:

Students nine years to thirteen years in age.

d) Educational programs provided by museum (i.e., education department, docent program, grade level served):

Special Museum tours and programs are held throughout the year for students in high school and for student members of the Society. Education Department trains volunteer docents and conducts class tours twice each week. School tours are limited by dependence on volunteer docents. Many requests must be turned down. Most students are in third to eighth grades inclusive.

e) Adult education:

Special Events Department conducts tours, conferences, lectures and exhibition opening receptions. Lectures by authorities include such subjects as New Jersey furniture, silver, architecture. Conferences are for librarians, school teachers and the public. Society members and non-members are welcome.

f) Field trips:

Field trips for students include assisting at sites of archaeological digs and visits to historic houses and villages, accompanied by teachers. For adults there are the weekend annual conferences, visits to groups of historic houses and other historical programs throughout the state.

g) Support services for local schools:

Support services for schools throughout the state include: Publication of a monthly periodical, The Crossroads, each issue devoted to a single historical article, and a quarterly, The Cockpit, conducting the statewide youth program, The Jerseymen, 1100 members of the Society who
belong to clubs in their schools and receive The Cockpit; conducting the school membership for teachers and librarians to assist them in teaching state history; also conducting several annual professional conferences for educators and librarians.

h) Number of requests for organized school tours denied because of lack of funding, space, teachers, time, etc.:

Because we are dependent on volunteers, we can now conduct no more than two classes through the Museum each week. A class of 40 is divided into three groups and each group is escorted by a trained docent. Now six docents handle two classes each week. We turn down requests because of lack of docents for six more school visits each week, making a total of eight or as many as a total of 320 children a week. We now have 80 at most. With sufficient docents, we could handle comfortably 10,000 a year instead of the present 1,500.

i) Examples of intermuseum cooperation:

The Museum maintains close liaison with other museums both individually or through the Museums Council of New Jersey, of which the director is a past chairman, and The League of Historical Societies of New Jersey. The Newark Museum, Morristown National Historical Park, The Pierpont Morgan Library, The New-York Historical Society, Princeton University, and the New York City museums are in close touch. The New Jersey State Museum, the National Portrait Gallery and other institutions borrow freely. The director meets informally with six other directors of East Coast societies to discuss mutual museum and other matters. Loans of material are made regularly to local and county society museums. The Director serves on Accreditation Visitation Committees for the American Association of Museums.

2. Present financial means of providing these services:

a) Local government:

The State of New Jersey contributes $25,000 annually through the Department of Education to help support the Education Department of the Society which performs Museum educational functions.

b) Private contributions:

The Junior League of the Oranges and Short Hills towards the New Jersey History Gallery, installed in 1968..............$15,000
The Doris Duke Foundation for creating a fine arts gallery in the renovated Museum.........................$50,000
The Samuel H. Kress Foundation for use in part for museum purposes, including a new gallery.........................$200,000
The National Endowment for the Arts for additional air conditioning on a three-to-one matching grant............$8,750
The above grants were mostly in conjunction with renovation of the building. Many other donations were received but not designated specifically for the Museum.

c) Admission:

Admission to the Museum is never charged.

d) Bequests:

No bequests of funds to the Society have been designated for the Museum alone. There are many bequests of museum objects.

e) Corporate:

Approximately 75 New Jersey corporations belong to the Society, paying dues of $250 or $500 a year. Some of them have contributed $15,000 to the Development Fund. None of these monies are for the specific use of any one department.

f) Evidence of support through revenue sharing:

None

g) Other

None

3. Present and future financial needs:

a) Operations: Present Future Needs

$2,850 $6,000

(Purchases $2,500) (Purchases $5,000)

b) Maintenance

$3,000 $6,000

(Conservation) (Conservation)

c) Salaries

$15,150 $25,000

$14,250

d) Program (Exhibitions) None 5,000

e) Trends in museum funding, i.e., comparison of budget in 1971 versus 1972

1971 - $17,900 1972 - $20,050

(This is not a normal comparison due to the renovation and consequent closing in April 1972 through to the present.)
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