

2014 Annual Meeting Minutes

Harpers Ferry Historical Association

June 29, 2014

Harpers Ferry Center Patio, Camp Hill, Harpers Ferry, WV

The Annual Meeting was called to order at approximately 2:15p

Welcome

Rebecca Harriet, Superintendent, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park

Park Milestones

Dennis Frye, Chief of Interpretation, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park

Dennis reported that June 30 is the 70th Anniversary of the park's formation. Dennis recounted milestones and important details in the park's creation and evolution, recalling many of the key figures, events, and pieces of legislation that made the park what it is today.

Welcome and Introduction

Jim Sylvia, President

Financial Summary for FY 2013

Deborah Piscitelli, Executive Director

Our Sales Revenue was down from the previous year by \$74,000, from \$417,000 in 2012 to \$343,000 in 2013, about 18%.

Membership was up to \$8,505 and general donations were approximately \$4,000. We also received specific donations for the David Larson Memorial Fund and the Don Redman Heritage Concert.

We account for our loss of sales three ways:

- The reduced number of school groups in the spring cost us about \$25,000.
- In addition to having poor sales in September (the worst since the 1996 flood) we had also experienced an unusual bump in sales in September 2012 from our 150th Civil War event.
- Finally, the government shutdown occurring the first two weeks of October cost us \$25,000-\$30,000 in sales

In response we reduced our operating expenses last year by 10% and reduced our payroll by 10%, and reduced our cost of goods sold by 18%.

Had we not had the shutdown we would have ended our year about \$10-12K profit; as it was we had almost \$2,000 loss for the year.

In 2013 we donated about \$40,000 in cash donations and about the same amount in in-kind services to the Park.

These funds supported weekend Living History music and trades demonstrations, the Don Redman Heritage Concert, the Christmas event, African American History Month exhibits, 150th Civil War event, Civil War Vodcast project for Middle School Students, Civil War Teacher Institute, School House Ridge 5th grade Civil War program, interpretive supplies and materials, and digitization of park archival material. It also supported our publications program.

Our total cumulative aid to the Park since 1971 is over \$2.5 million.

Executive Director's Report

Deborah Piscitelli, Executive Director

Over the last five years the association has published four books: The John Brown Raid Handbook, Under Fire, Harpers Ferry Anthology, Blue and Gray Battle of Harpers Ferry, and The Upper Potomac in the Civil War. The sale of these books has been strong and compared to other items, has resulted in a 5% increase of that category along with our remainder books. Our proprietary publications are now all paid for and we still have good inventory on all items.

The association was faced with decreasing sales revenue throughout the year, so has begun to seek additional sources of revenue. Sales figures for 2013 have been discouraging. Coming out of a bad winter, poor economy, declining school and youth visitation, and decreased general visitation in the spring leaves us \$26,000 below last year's revenue for the first five months of this year. Sales figures have paralleled park visitation statistics, especially in the area of school groups who are our main Spring customers. We just experienced the worst sales in 20 years for the months of March, April, and May.

- March 46% down from 2013; 58% over 10 year period; school visitation down 60%
- April 19% down from 2013; 30% down over a 10 year period; school visitation down 55%
- May 14% down from 2013, 8% down over a 10 year period; school visitation down 5%

Projected sales figures for June show us down about 17% from last June and about 6% over a 10 year average. We hope to have a boost from our planned July and September events and an off-site sales opportunity later in the season.

Recognizing the need to establish additional sources of revenue, we have begun new projects through a Supplemental Agreement approved through the diligent efforts of our superintendent.

Last year was the first year of our Certified Park Guide program, a for-fee service operated by the association in cooperation with the Park. Stephanie will tell you more about this shortly.

We are also offer Living History Workshops and plan to refine and expand our future selections.

Our latest venture which is proving popular are the Horse and Wagon rides along the Shenandoah River on weekends This has the potential for providing a good source of additional revenue.

And finally, I have been negotiating this past year with the Jefferson County CVB who is expanding its Tourist Center. We will have a sales outlet in the new space, and hopefully reach a new audience and more easily serve our local clientele.

We have received a \$1,350 grant from the WV Division of Arts and Culture and a donation from the NAACP to assist with the Don Redman Concert. We also received another small grant with a second pending from the West Virginia Humanities Council for this year's Civil War events speakers. (Mention Sentinel).

In 2013, the Association administered funds for the park for the Teacher Institute and Park Intern program. In 2014, we have continued administering funds for the intern program and also for several school transportation grants.

One very bright spot shines throughout. And that is our members and your continuing support this past year through your faithful membership, extra donations, purchases, attending workshops and events, your encouraging words and your in-kind services to us. I appreciate this more than you can know and I thank you.

Park Guide Program

Stephanie Sager, Operations Manager

Last spring we began a new program to offer park visitors the opportunity for a more in-depth tour of the park. The Certified Park Guide program was designed to enhance and supplement existing tours given by park rangers.

This guide program was designed by rangers Todd Bolton and David Fox and the association staff. It was approved, after multiple meetings to create a formal supplemental agreement, at the NPS solicitor's office through the effort of our Superintendent Rebecca Harriett.

Our guides pass a rigorous 200-question written exam on all subjects of park history and park resources. The written test is followed by training, and trial tour experience critiqued by park rangers. Those who pass are then certified to give 2 ½ hour tours of the park beginning at the Visitor Center and including Bolivar Heights, Camp Hill and Storer College, and the lower town area. The association administers the program, taking reservations and scheduling guides.

Our current guides are Jim Prentice and association member Doug Perks and association president, Jim Silvia. Another association member, Don Burgess, is in the oral testing phase.

In 2013, beginning in June, guides led 53 programs. Another 12 tours had to be cancelled as a result of the shutdown in October. Revenue for the association, which amounts to 20% of the total tour fee, was \$1,000 in 2013.

This year the guides have already delivered 40 programs. Tours have included commercial bus groups, school and scout groups, families gathered for reunions, Civil War enthusiasts and history groups, embassy groups, and families and couples.

Living History Workshops Report

Stephanie Sager, Operations Manager

The living history program is fast becoming a successful program with HFHA members and park visitors. The Association would like to share a little information about the workshops and how exiting they have been for everyone involved.

Since 2012 we have hosted a little over 300 participants educating them with 19th century techniques on:

- How to make candy, bread, ice cream & pie at Roeder's Confectionary
- Gardening using heirloom seeds grown in the park's period garden
- A few craftsmen studied the art of forging and making traditional tin ware with period methods and tools

The most popular workshops have been the Tavern Meals at White Hall Tavern and bread baking in the beehive oven. The authentic experience for the participants has encouraged them to try other workshops, tell their friends and families, or come back for a repeat workshop.

The cost of the workshops has been between \$10.00 for workshops such as ice cream making, and \$400.00 for learning the Collodion photography process in the wetplate workshop. The average cost however is \$20.00 per person. The fee for the workshops cover the supplies needed along with the cost of interpretation / the interpreter if it is not done by a member of the Park staff.

Participation is up this year. Last year the retail sales were a total of approximately \$2400.00. This year we have already reached \$2,000.00 mark. This is encouraging due to the fact that we want these programs to sustain themselves and also bring revenue to the Association.

If you would like participate or would like any other information you can visit the Association's website for dates and descriptions.

The Association has been advertising for the workshops mostly through social media: Facebook and email blasts. If you are not on our email list a sign up has been provided today.

Also, observers are encouraged at most of the workshops if you are curious but may not have the time.

Publications & Membership Activities

Cathy Baldau, Membership Coordinator & Publications Specialist

Cathy reported that considerable progress is being made on publication of a long-awaited update to Tom Hahn's *Towpath Guide to the C&O Canal*. The guidebook was last published in 1999. A call for volunteers through the C&O Canal Association helped recruit several volunteer "Level Walkers" to review and update the guidebook's content. The Association is also working on the guidebook design in-house, and working hard to bring the book up to 21st Century publication standards.

2013 was the best year for Association membership ever. While the number of members has been fairly static, the levels at which members have renewed has increased, resulting in more income to the Association. Most current members have been with the Association either less than 5 years or more than 10 years.

Cathy sent out a survey via email, which garnered 61 responses. In particular, survey results showed considerable support for members-only activities and events.

Cathy recognized Armory Superintendent members, Paymaster members, and Master Armorer members, thanking all members for their continued support of the Association. Cathy also recognized Scot Faulkner for a memorial bequest on behalf of his mother, who passed away in 2013.

Report from the Park

Rebecca Harriett, Park Superintendent

Rebecca recounted the ordeal of the October 2013 government shutdown and the impact it had on the Park, the Association, and the community.

For 2013, park visitation was down about 2%. There was a particularly sharp decline in school programs. On a positive note, park visitation in May 2014 was up 18%, though the previous months in 2014 have seen a decrease in visitation.

The park has come into possession of a lot on Cavalier Heights.

Rebecca described the park's internship program, for which the Association has provided stipends, as the NPS was not able to provide these due to new budget rules. She also spoke about the Park Guide Program, which meets a need for our park visitors. The Association has been a great partner in helping the park meet various needs and in helping solve problems.

Finally, Rebecca reported that the net effect of Budget Sequestration, for which there was a projected reduction in funding of 8% or \$500,000, turned out to be a cut of only about \$250,000. No word on funding for FY 2015.

Election of Board Members

Jim Silvia, President

Jim conducted voice votes, with motions made and seconded, to re-elect Carol Gallant, Dave Gilbert, and Jim Jenkins to three-year terms. The three candidates were elected by unanimous voice vote.

Jim then introduced three new board candidates, solicited motions which were seconded, to elect Patrice Flynn to a new 3-year term, Ed Wheelless to a new 2-year term, and Bob Johnson to a new 1-year term. All three candidates were elected by unanimous voice vote.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:30p.

Submitted by David T. Gilbert, 6/30/2014