

## **Great Places, Great Debates: Opening Historic Sites to Civic Engagement**

**April 1-2, 2004 • Center for Architecture • New York, New York**

A National Park Service Conference co-hosted by Regional Plan Association and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum.

Organized in partnership with City Lore, The Gotham Center at CUNY, the Historic Districts Council, New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, New York City Historic House Trust, New York Historical Society, New York State Parks, Recreation, & Historic Preservation, Preservation New Jersey, and The Weeksville Society.

### ***What role can historic sites and landmarks play in the civic life of our communities?***

A movement is growing to establish historic places as our new town halls, active centers for citizen participation. The American Association of Museums envisioned the 21<sup>st</sup>-century museum as “a center where people gather to meet and converse, a place that celebrates the richness of individual and collective experience, and a participant in collaborative problem solving. It is an active, visible player in civic life, a safe haven, and a trusted incubator of change.”

In 2001, the Northeast Region of the National Park Service challenged itself to explore “how to make every park a place of citizen engagement.” “Everywhere,” noted Regional Director Marie Rust, “our parks can be places where visitors can expect to be helped to use history and their experience with the natural environment to engage with the present, and thus to be better citizens. This is a tall order, but we are up to it.”

Through interpretation, curriculum-based education, and other public programming historic sites can connect the heritage of the nation to its contemporary environmental, social, and cultural issues. These intersections between historical and contemporary issues are at the heart of civic engagement.

### ***What concrete strategies can historic sites and landmarks use to meet this new challenge?***

All over the world, historic places – large and small -- are transforming themselves into venues for civic engagement and public dialogue, expanding their interpretation to include multiple perspectives, and exploring the present-day implications of their histories. This conference will present successful models and provide the opportunity for participants to learn how their historic site can help individuals and communities address the issues most central to their lives today.

### ***Learn through Experience***

Innovative models and participatory workshops on:

- How to connect your history to the issues that matter most to your community
- How to train front line educators to connect the past with your community's present
- How to form effective partnerships with community organizations
- How to facilitate effective dialogue with diverse publics, even on sensitive issues
- How to incorporate multiple perspectives and tell the whole story

### ***Make Connections***

This conference is designed for a diverse audience including owners, managers, and interpreters of local, state, and federal historic places; educators and program developers; community groups and civic organizations; special interest groups and advocates interested in partnering with historic sites; representatives of communities surrounding historic sites or residents of historic districts; historic preservation advocates, scholars of history and memory, professionals, and students.

### ***Share Your Expertise***

We are seeking proposals for presentations that explore the variety of ways in which historic sites can draw connections between their site's history and its contemporary implications. Presentations should provide specific case studies or examples of techniques for identifying and addressing current issues at historic sites, ways to develop programs that inspire citizen participation with little to no budget or staff, techniques for identifying a community's needs and engaging communities in civic dialogue, how to interpret the past from multiple perspectives to raise contemporary questions, and how to foster effective dialogue among visitors.

Please send proposals for panels and individual papers (include a 100 word abstract and a one-page c.v.) by December 31, 2003, to the NPS conference coordinator: Catherine Turton, National Park Service, Northeast Region, 200 Chestnut Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, Philadelphia, PA 19106 (p) 215-597-1726 (f) 215-597-0932 (e) [catherine\\_turton@nps.gov](mailto:catherine_turton@nps.gov).