Dead Men Tell No Tales: How Can Creative Approaches to Communication Keep Historic Sites From Going Silent.

Sabra Smith, University of Pennsylvania

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Advisor: Gail Caskey Winkler

Abstract
The first evidence that there was a crisis looming for historic house museums came in 1988, when an informal study commissioned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation revealed that of 5,000 historic property museums in the United States, 54% of them received less than 5,000 visitors annually. This was followed in the 1990s by a series of conferences on issues such as "The Future of the Historic House Museum in the 21st Century" and "Rethinking the Uses and Stories of Historic Sites." Now that we are well into the first decade of the 21st century, these efforts have shifted to an emphasis on problem-solving, from creating a more professional nonprofit management model to the more drastic option of deaccessioning collections.

Experts predict that the trend of deaccessioning will not only continue, but increase. The most stunning example to date of a house museum shifting back to private ownership took place in December, 2006, when Colonial Williamsburg announced its intention to sell Carter's Grove plantation (built from 1750-1755), once considered a "must see" tourist destination. A spokesperson for Colonial Williamsburg said the site was closed due to declining attendance and shifting priorities. In April, 2007, the property, with protective easements in place, was listed with a specialty real estate firm at an asking price of $19 million.

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