Camden County History Alliance
Survey Report
Executive Summary

In July 2017, the Camden County Historical Society received a grant from the **New Jersey Historic Trust through the Discover NJ History License Plate Heritage Tourism Grant Program** to begin work on the Camden County Heritage Tourism Plan. The work products included an online survey of the 41 Camden County History Alliance (CCHA) partner organizations, a Findings Report (this document) about the survey results, and a memorandum about the heritage trails that could link the sites and organizations together for joint marketing purposes in the future.

The online survey had 48 questions and was open from August 10, 2017 to September 1, 2017. We were delighted that **37 of the 41 CCHA partner organizations participated** in the survey, a remarkable **90% response rate,** indicative of the enthusiasm for public history in Camden County. The Findings Report is organized into five sections: Executive Summary, survey overview and insights, analysis of survey questions, memo on possible heritage trails, and three appendices.

The CCHA organizations manage a total of 44 buildings in the county. These buildings vary from sheds to magnificent Federal style homes, repurposed churches, rectories, taverns, stores, a battleship, rowhomes, and farmhouses.

Camden County history organizations have multiple purposes. These **small, but mighty organizations** undertake a wide variety of tasks. They collect objects, manage archives, conduct outreach and tours, publish books, and are the *de facto* local preservation organizations in their community. Several service organizations cater to these nonprofit heritage organizations. Among the 37 respondents: **57% are historical societies, 45% are historic sites/historic house museums, and** two (2) historical societies said that their organization is not incorporated.

Paid and volunteer staffing

Volunteers drive most of the historic sites and history organizations in Camden County. **Over 81% of the 37 organizations are managed solely by volunteer stewards.**
- 32% say their volunteer group is stable,
- 21% declining,
- 18% growing,
- 8% don't use volunteers, and
- 18% had another response than those above.

Eleven (11) organizations have full-time paid staff, and twelve (12) organizations pay part time staff members.
- Eight (8) staffed organizations manage historic sites/house museums, and
- Three (3) staffed organizations are nonprofit service organizations.

Budgets, endowments, and top revenue sources

Close to half (43%) of the respondents said their organization did not have a formal budget.
- 75% have budgets are under $10,000,
- One (1) staffed organization has a budget between $101,000 and $150,000, and

- Three (3) staffed organizations have an operating budget over $150,000.

Six (6) organizations have an endowment, and two (2) are local historical societies. These organizations have **more than a million dollars in their endowment accounts.**

The five (5) top revenue sources of the CCHA organizations are:
- membership or individual donations,
- city or county government support,
- special events,
- gift shop/publication sales, and
- tours.

Founding, opening, restoration dates

The CCHA organizations were founded in the last 75 years, 56% of the organizations were founded between 1949-1999, and 20% were founded in the 21st century. These historic buildings opened to the public from 1914 to 2017., 32% opened in the 20th century, and 14% opened in the 21st century. Half of the 17 historic sites are managing properties that were last restored between 25 and 50 years ago. Eight of the sites are owned by the government, and we assume there would be capital funds available for necessary restorations. Still, half the sites may be facing maintenance and restoration needs as the useful life of building systems are aging.

Collections storage

Three of the historical societies stated that they do not have a location to store or display their archives or collections. Two organizations store their archives/collections in municipal building closets, and in one case archives are stored in a board member's basement.

Open times and visitation

Twelve (12) organizations said they are open only by appointment, while seven (7) respondents are available by appointment outside of their regular operating hours. The most common day for respondents to be open DAILY is on Wednesday, when nine (9) respondents are open.

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These sites use a combination of paid and volunteer staff to work with visitors. **The two sites that have between 20,000 and 100,000 visitors annually noted these visitation numbers in other comments in their survey.**

Forty one percent (41%) of respondents answered that they do not offer school visits to their site. Eleven (11) sites host between 100 and 1000 students yearly, with the most common range being between 100 to 250 yearly. **Almost two-thirds (65%) use some form of tracking to determine the number of visitors.** Thirteen (13) of the 17 historic sites use sign-in books or ticket sales to track visitation.

Interpretive methods and historic themes

Eight (8) historic sites said they use more than ten (10) different interpretation methods; two sites say they incorporate sixteen (16) different interpretation methods. The five most common interpretive methods used were:

1. informational brochures (57%),
2. lectures or workshops for adults (54%),
3. guided tours (49%),
4. temporary exhibits (46%), and
5. permanent exhibits (46%).

The top seven most often named interpretive themes and likely heritage trails are:

1. Architecture and design 15 organizations
2. 20th century history 14
3. Women's history14
4. Famous person(s) 14
5. Revolutionary War and Colonial Life 13
6. African-American History (including Underground Railroad/Slavery and Civil War) 10
7. Transportation, Maritime and Industry 9

We provide a memo about possible heritage trails elsewhere in this findings report.

More than 50% of the respondents used the following outreach methods for programming purposes:

- Camden County History Alliance Magazine (62%),
- conducting outreach at large festivals or events (59%),
- maintaining a Facebook page or group (58%),
- getting coverage or having a column (not advertisements) in a local newspaper (54%),
- having a website (54%), and
- hosting lectures or workshops for adults (51%).

Mailing lists, email lists, and newsletters

Of the 37 respondents, **62% maintain a mailing (postal) list**, but the majority had less than 99 contacts (57%) in their mailing lists. Over 60% of respondents **collect email addresses**, but half (48%) have less than 99 contacts. **Two thirds (66%) of respondents noted that they don't have an e-newsletter.** Thirteen (13) organizations used their regular email accounts rather than online newsletter platforms.

Social media use

Fifty-nine percent (59%) have a website, and **16% use Facebook in lieu of a website** for their online presence. About a quarter of the CCHA organizations have no website or Facebook presence. For those that do have a website, 40% know how to check their web traffic analytics.

About two thirds of the organizations are on Facebook:

- 9 organizations have 251-500 followers (39%),
- 6 organizations have 501-1000 followers (26%),
- 3 organizations have 1001-2000 (17%), and
- 3 organizations have 5000+ followers (17%).

The CCHA organizations reported more Facebook followers than email or mail contacts, suggesting that

Facebook is an effective way to reach higher numbers of people. The organizations with email lists of 99 or fewer contacts have 250-750 Facebook followers. Nine (9) of the historic sites have a website, while three do not. Four (4) use Facebook as their online platform.

Training needs

The four top training needs for all organizations were: finding new volunteers, funding for operating expenses, funding for building restoration, and funding for special projects. We provide other topics for training in the body of this findings report.

Visitor readiness

The six bullets mentioned below are all critical components of welcoming visitors to historic sites, be they out of town visitors, schoolchildren, or community members. Survey respondents said:
- Do you believe your site is well maintained? 83% yes,
- Is your site compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)? 50% yes,
- Does your site have public restrooms? 82% yes,
- Are the public restrooms at your site handicapped compliant? 42% yes,
- Can a tour bus park at your site? 66% yes, and
- Does your site have dedicated visitor parking? 66% yes.

Recommendations and conclusions

We offer the following recommendations as next steps for the individual CCHA partner organizations so they can begin now to boost their organizational capacity and prepare for future elements of the Heritage Tourism Plan, if it is funded.
- Encourage sites without a website or Facebook page to create one and update it regularly, and aggressively collect email addresses.
- Review your current programming and interpretation efforts and discuss what may need to change or new methods you might use.
- Attend any relevant training program.
- Learn about the programming at nearby sites and those that share a proposed heritage trail so that you can make quality referrals and cross market your sites.
- Increase your site's online visibility by posting your site and its annual special events on www.VisitNJ.com, www.visitsouthjersey.com, and www.Journeythroughjersey.com, as well as Yelp and Trip Advisor.

Camden County's history organizations tell many different and compelling stories about our collective past. This survey begins to codify what we know about these sites, and provides insights on how to create high quality visitor experiences. We believe the future will be very bright for the CCHA partner organizations that wish plan and jointly market this fabulous collection of treasured landmarks to neighbors and visitors.