

Asking visitors what they really want: Case study of the Jacobs Vanderveer House Bedminster NJ

Mid Atlantic Association of Museums
October 8, 2012



Presenters

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Presentation Outline

- Introductions
- About the Jacobus Vanderveer House and the Friends of JVH and current programs
- About the Project
- Prior restoration, studies, and installation
- Heritage Tourism Assessment and Interpretive Plan
- Audience research components
- Focus on Survey Results
- Interpretive themes
- Programming being planned
- Lessons learned



About The Jacobus Vanderveer House



Principal Façade as Restored



Current Programs



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Grant Objective

- A comprehensive heritage tourism assessment, leading to:
 - Better understanding of the JVH audience
 - an interpretive plan and
 - interpretive products and strategies that will enable us to use the Vanderveer House, our research archive and historic collections to provide higher levels of visitor education and enjoyment



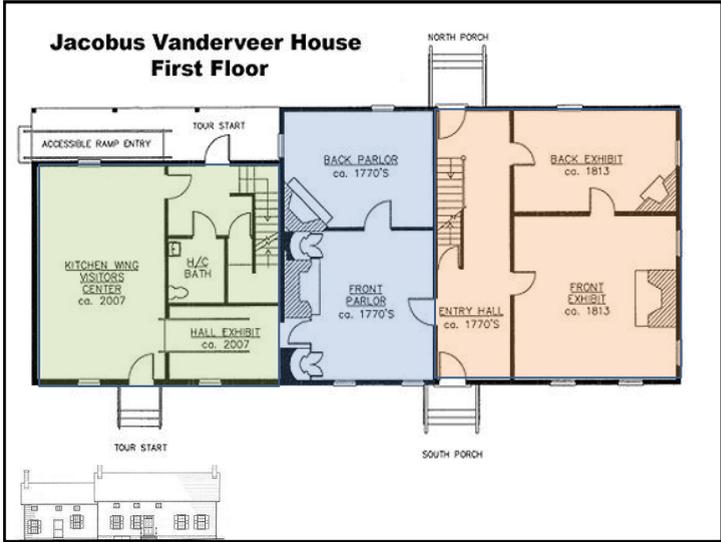
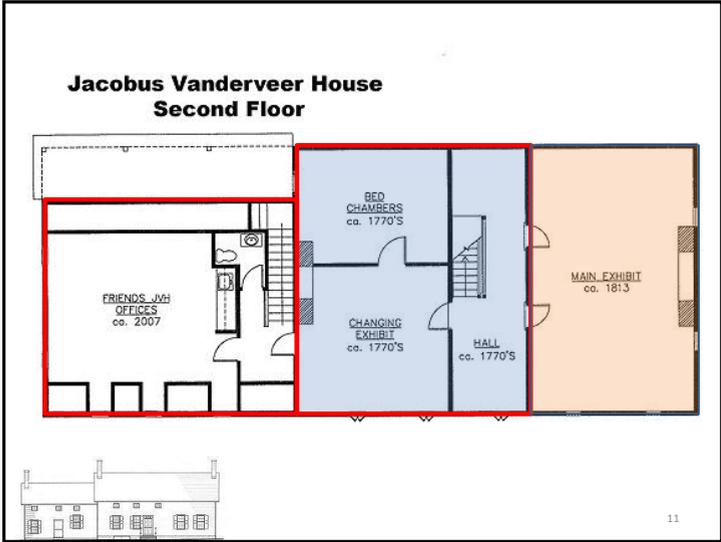
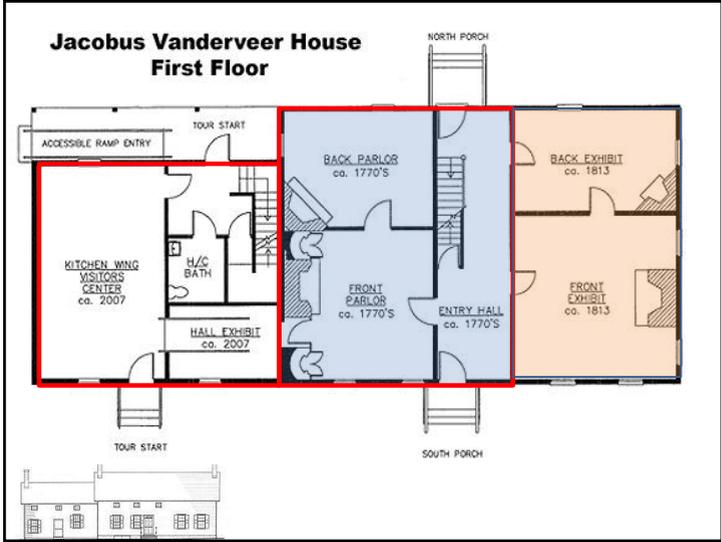
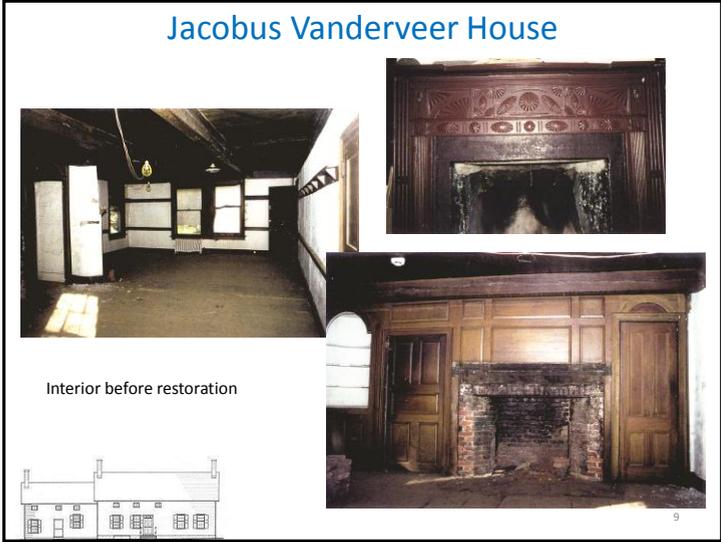
Jacobus Vanderveer House

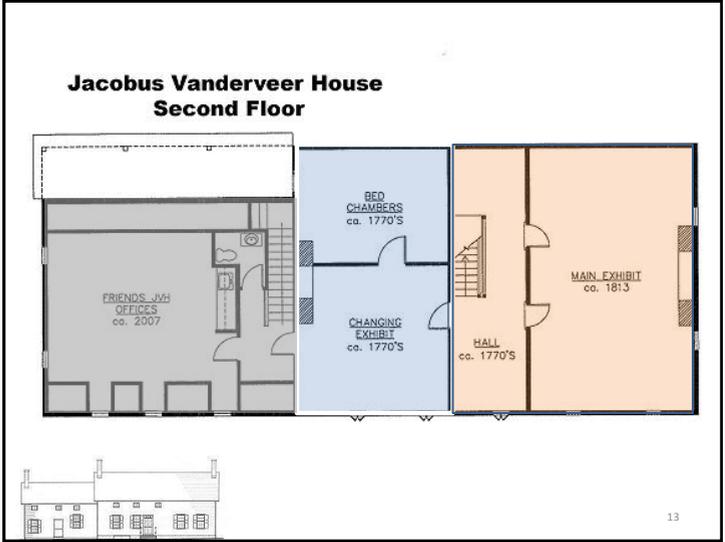


North elevation

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Jacobus Vanderveer House





Site givens – building restoration



Site givens – analysis of significance

- Major track record of documentation reaching back to 1935
- Pointing site interpretation to 18th century history of house as:
- Example of building of period (local history)
- General Knox



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New Jersey Historic Trust Grant to JVH



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Project Design

- 3 Phases:
 1. Research
 - a) Audience Research
 - b) Review of existing research regarding interpretation
 2. Interpretive Plan, identify interpretive products
 3. Interpretive product implementation



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Audience Research Components

1. Historic House Museums Today presentation
2. Board member visits to peer sites
3. Current & former Board member interviews
4. On-line survey
5. Local Partner interviews



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Audience Research Components

6. Revolutionary War sites school program site visits
7. Residents focus groups
8. Memo on informal programming for kids
9. Create matrix of audiences and programs
10. Create final audience research report



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Reach Museum Advisors Research

- 60% want to visit “on our own” “self curated experiences”
- 59% Talk with costumed interpreters-- historians, docents” Staff does not direct their visit”
- 48% want to view objects or object-based exhibits
- 46% want to attend programs or events
- Guided tours—only 45% like 55% don’t like guided tours



Audience Research Findings

- Audience
- Board
- Programming
- Partnerships
- Children’s programs



Findings - Audience

- The JVH audience is made up of:
 - 35-65 year olds,
 - half with children at home,
 - women
- Who have an interest in:
 - The history of the American Revolution
 - Everyday life in the 18th Century
 - Local history
- This audience is typical of most house museums nationwide



Findings – Programming (survey)

1. A knowledgeable guide in specific rooms in the house to answer questions
2. Shopping events such as antiques markets, designer showcases & local artists
3. Printed brochures, maps, guides
4. Educational lectures or programs on topics related to the Vanderveer House
5. Demonstration of crafts, historic cooking or similar activities by costumed interpreters (not doing/classes)



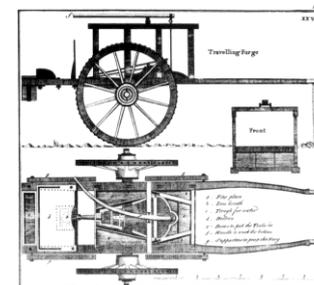
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Findings: Programming (survey)

6. Guided tours
7. Historical re-enactments of Revolutionary War life by costumed interpreters
8. Social events
9. Lectures on antiques and historic objects care
10. Smartphone app with interactive screen-based features, or similar, handheld device



Findings - Programming



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Matrix: Programming/Audience

JVH Audience ** program reserved in advance	Colonial Christmas Dinner**	Colonial Christmas Open house Programs**	Colonial Christmas School Programs**	Colonial Christmas Receptions**	Colonial BBQ event	Antique, crafts, appraisal events	Five Generals Tour**	Journey to the Past Weekend**	Individual tours **	Group tours **	Weekend Guided tours casual visitors	Guide on demand	Kids hands on tours **	Adult hands on tours **	Curator tours **	Specialized activities**	Children's Summer camps**	Self guided brochures	Cell phone tours adults	Laminated cards in rooms	Room books	Room panels	Podcasts/Videos	
Children in school classes																								
Area Public School Fourth and Fifth Grade classes																								
Area Middle School History classes																								
Area National History Day clubs																								
Area High School History classes																								
Individual undergraduate college students																								
Individual graduate school students MA / PhD																								
Area Parochial and Private School 4 and 5 grade classes																								
Children in non-school settings																								
Home school parents and children grade schools																								
Boy Scout Troops earning merit badges																								
Individual Boy Scout earning merit badges																								



Making decision on programming

- Task force formed to identify programming for coming year
- 4 audience groups for programming
 - Individual adults
 - Family groups
 - Children in non-school groups
 - Specialized groups
- Voted on top 3 interpretive methods for that audience



Top programming for 2013

- Hands on activities for kids
- Night at the Museum
- Summer History Camp
- Parent/child activities
- Colonial BBQ
- Lectures
- Special Exhibits/Loan shows
- Curator tours
- Self-guided activities
- Antique, craft and appraisal events
- Demonstrations
- Junior docent program



Creating a year long calendar of events

- Colonial Christmas
 - 2 weekends after Thanksgiving
 - Gala dinner & Cocktail reception at house
 - House decorated by interior designers for Christmas
 - Children's programming
- Colonial BBQ summer event
- Lecture Series
- Partner developed events
 - 5 Generals Tour
 - Fall Fest
 - Weekend Journey to the Past



Interpretation at the Jacobus Vanderveer House



First Steps: Analysis of Mountain of Documentation

- Take existing, extensive documentation
- Develop “building block” documents

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Interpretation – theme development

- Narratives established by previous efforts:
 - 1: Bedminster and the American Revolution, the Pluckemin Cantonment, Gen. Knox’s headquarters
 - 2: Dutch in the Raritan Valley: the Vanderveer Family in Bedminster Community
 - 3: Dutch, English and American traditions in architecture



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First Steps: “Building Block” documents

- Outline of existing theme bases and sub-categories
Sample:

The Vanderveers, Life in the Raritan Valley in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

Farming and settlement life in the area in the eighteenth century

Character of rural settlement in the Raritan Valley

Density and patterns

Agriculture and crops

Buildings (including JVH House) and architectural traditions

How does the house work / how was it used

How was it built and how did it change over time

What other buildings were there on the property

How does it relate to other houses of the period

The Vanderveers over three generations in the JVH

Dutch-American – the meaning of hybrid culture



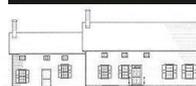
First Steps: "Building Block" documents

- Timeline

1770				Boston Massacre
1772		Jacob makes his will for his relatively large estate. It first gives money to the Dutch reformed church, but fairly small amounts. Leaves son Laurens (Lawrence) 430 acre "plantation where he now dwells [sic] on," leaves son Elias a 435 acre plantation "where on I now dwell" and to son Jacobus/James he leaves "the land over the river", more than 500 undeveloped acres. The Jacobus Vanderveer house will be built on this property.	Lucy Flucker sees Henry Knox on military parade	
1772-73	House / property development	Dendrochronological analysis of timbers and extensive purchases of hardware by Jacobus/James indicate that the Jacobus Vanderveer House was largely constructed		
1773		Jacobus/James's buys pewter, cups and saucers, pepper and sugar boxes, needles and tape for his wife Winche (marriage date unknown)	Lucy Flucker joins groups of "smart young people" who gather at Knox's bookstore in Cornhill	
1774		Jacob signs a codicil to his will leaving Jacobus/James an additional 35 acres and "the negro girl called Jemo" instead of Wine.	Henry Knox and Lucy Flucker are married in June. He is 24, she is 18. Her parents are unhappy about the marriage, but acquiesce to it.	Boston Tea Party

First Steps: "Building Block" documents

- "Cast of Characters" brief biographies



First Steps: "Building Block" documents

- Interpretive Storyline
 - "The Jacobus Vanderveer House tells the story of life in the Bedminster area in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century: the everyday life of Dutch-American settler families, their beliefs and lifeways, and the remarkable events of the Revolutionary War in the area"
- Outline of Subject Topics. For example:
 - The Knoxes and the Pluckemin Cantonment
 - a. Revolutionary War; b. American Military History
 - c. Domestic life; d. Life, sickness, and death for women and children in the 18th century; e. Women's education; f. Inherited wealth and elite status



Themes Development

- Sample theme statements:
 - "The Vanderveers were people of strong Dutch traditions, belief and ties to community who prospered in the New World and over time became part of the American Melting Pot."
 - "The Pluckemin Cantonment was a crucial event in the American Revolution and American military history."
 - "Slavery was a well-entrenched institution in New Jersey in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries."



Matrix: Connecting Themes to Site

Theme	Product	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Landscape	Orientation video	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Interior	Room books	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Exterior	Self-guiding cards/brochures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Architectural	Tour script	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Creating Interpretive Products

- Create interpretive products that meet goals:
 1. Use themes
 2. Match organization capacity
 3. Work with site constraints and opportunities
 4. Address interests of audience
 1. Orientation video
 2. Room books
 3. Self-guiding cards/brochures
 4. Tour script that touches on themes and works with site

Lessons Learned

- Formal school programs will have to wait
- Volunteer recruitment critical to success
- Restoration decisions made 10 years ago impact interpretation today
- Being open on weekends is difficult
- Part time staff may be necessary

Thanks!

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