

# NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES



## SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE

### Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions Institution: Shady Side Rural Heritage Society

**NOTE:** This sample narrative conforms to a past set of grant guidelines. Please consult the revised guidelines for 2008 at: <http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/pag.html>.

#### **A. What activity would the grant support?**

The NEH Preservation Grant will support the preparation of a plan for improving environmental conditions for the Shady Side Rural Heritage Society's Museum and Library Collections, a critical priority in the Society's CAP Survey and Long-Range Conservation Plan. Over the last two years, the SSRHS has been collecting data (using data loggers) on temperature and relative humidity in areas where collections are stored or exhibited. This project will allow the SSRHS to collaborate with a HVAC specialist and a collections conservator to analyze this data, assess the current operations of the Museum's HVAC system, and develop a prioritized set of recommendations for improving the collections environment. This plan will take into consideration both low and higher-tech options for climate control as well as the needs of the historic structure in which collections are housed.

#### **B. What are the content and size of the humanities collections that are the focus of the project?**

This project will address the needs of the Society's entire collection. The Society collects objects and archival materials reflective of the history and traditions of Shady Side, and objects used in the interpretation of its historic site -- the Captain Salem Avery House. The historic site is uniquely significant for its dual periods of interpretation. From 1860 to 1887 the site was the home of Captain Salem Avery, a waterman and buy boat captain who migrated to the Chesapeake from Long Island in search of greater opportunity during the heyday of oystering on the Bay. The second period of interpretation begins in the early 20th century and encompasses the rarely told story of a minority group and their recreational use of the Bay. During the 1920s, a group of Masons from Washington, D.C., most of who were Jewish, purchased the property as a fishing club for their members. Led by the sons of Samuel Gompers (founder and president of the AFL), they were denied access to many public beaches, private clubs, and communities because of their ethnicity. In addition to illuminating the prejudice and discrimination long a part of American life, the story of this

waterman's home turned clubhouse also mirrors the development of Shady Side, and, in a larger context, the evolution of the Chesapeake Bay region from commerce to recreation. The Society

has recently launched a major initiative to research, collect and document the “Fishing Club” era in the site’s history.

The Society’s collection of more than 1650 artifacts, most dating from the mid-19th century to the present, includes furniture and documents from the National Masonic Fishing and Country Club, household furnishings appropriate to a 19th century waterman’s home, fishing and boat-building tools and equipment, and four historic work and pleasure boats. The steep decline of the waterman during the past 75 years has made the Captain Salem Avery House’s collections of furniture, clothing, domestic utensils, and tools used in the waterman’s business significant as an educational resource. The Society also collects items made, used or important in the life of the community. Many of these objects are unique to Shady Side, designed to meet local needs and reflect local traditions in a time before nationalization (and globalization) of material culture. Examples include a piano built in Shady Side’s short-lived piano factory (founded by a German immigrant family), a medical bag belonging to a one of the nation’s first female country doctors, a typewriter used in the publication of a Shady Side newspaper “The Great Swamper,” locally-carved duck decoys, soda bottles from a local bottling company, and the Edna Florence, a “West River deadrise” designed and built by Shady Side boat builder Captain Perry Rogers expressly for use by tongers on the West River.

The Society also maintains research materials for students, staff, members, the community and outside scholars in the Flora Ethel Andrews Memorial Library. The Library collection includes more than 2500 documents, rare photographs, post cards and other ephemera related to local history, including deeds, wills and more than 1000 images of families, buildings, places and events in Shady Side. One of the most valuable resources preserved by the Society are more than 200 video and audio-oral histories, recorded between 1985 and today, that capture the memories of longtime Shady Side residents as well as summer visitors (many no longer living). The information contained in them is unique and provides an eyewitness perspective on social, cultural and technological changes in southern Anne Arundel County. In addition, the recordings offer valuable insights into regional and national history. They give students and researchers an opportunity to look at American history through a “local lens” and reveal how national and world events impacted our local communities.

### **C. How are these humanities collections used?**

The Society’s Museum and Library collections are used, interpreted and made accessible to the public through exhibitions, educational programs, research, and publications. Historic documents, photographs, and objects have been used to interpret both broad and focused facets of the community’s history in recent exhibitions, including “Shady Side’s Got History,” “Goin’ Down to Shady Side – Steamboat Days on the West River,” “Watermen through the Ages,” “Doc – The Life of Emily Hammond Wilson,” and an exhibition on the community’s early 20th century newspaper “The Great Swamper.” “That’s My Living – Following the Water,” a long-term outdoor exhibition in the Museum’s Boat Shed, features waterman’s tools and Chesapeake workboats illuminated by historic photographs and stories from the Society’s oral history collection. Model workboats from the Society’s collections have been exhibited in the Museum’s Great Room as well as loaned to Annapolis’ Banneker-Douglass Museum of African American History for an exhibition on African American watermen. The Society’s oral history and photograph collections are also featured in its widely-available publications, including *Doc, Spirit of Shady Side*, *Miss Ethel Remembers*, and *Captain Salem Avery House, Its History, 1860-1990*.

Collections are an integral part of many of the Society's educational programs and play a critical role in program development. For instance, the festival "Steamboat Days" featured dramatic portrayals of individuals from the Steamboat Era, their stories gleaned from the oral history collection. The oral history collection became a primary source for activities and historical narrative when designing the special event "A Turn of the Century Holiday" and "Through the Years," a Girl Scout program exploring life in the 1920s. Maps, documents, photos and other Library collections have been used to develop instructional materials for the Children's Summer Series.

Many educational programs actively engage the public in the study and analysis of the collections. Sunday afternoon visitors are encouraged to view readily-available oral history videos as a part of their tour. An open house at the Lula G. Scott Community Center, home of a Rosenwald school for African American students in the era of segregation, featured rarely-seen footage of former teachers and students sharing memories of the school. Both the Activity Guide and field trip of the Society's school program, "Seasons of a Chesapeake Bay Waterman," give more than 1000 students each year the opportunity to become historians and "decode" historical collections. When using the Activity Guide, students have the chance to "read" historical objects from the collection in a "Picture Predictions" activity. On the field trip they are able to see the actual items in person. In the Guide they learn about Captain Avery's family through analyzing his inventory and census records (from Library research files). At the Museum they assume the role of a member of the family and "take a trip" to Baltimore to sell oysters and buy goods to bring home to the "Swamp." The records of a buy boat captain from the same decade as Captain Avery provide the basis for the activity. Students take home reproductions of some of the documents as well as images of items listed on the captain's store receipts.

A partnership with a local high school gave students researching school segregation and integration for History Day the opportunity to visit the Museum for a workshop on using primary source documents as research tools. The students applied the techniques to historical sources from the Society's collection. The workshop with Society collections launched the students' History Day projects, one of which competed at National History Day. An outgrowth of this project was a teacher's workshop on "Using Oral History in the Classroom" which incorporated selections from the Society's collection. In 2006 the Society carried out a year-long museum/school/community partnership that brought together local students, teachers, members of the community and the Society to research, preserve and tell the story of Shady Side in the exhibition "Shady Side's Got History!" Central to the project were efforts to collect and document photographs, objects and memories from the community. Students not only worked with the Society's Museum and Library collections; they also helped us to broaden our collections. In 2007 the Society plans to conduct a survey of historic buildings in the community to add to the Maryland Inventory of Historic Places. The Society's collections will be a critical research tool for this project.

At its heart the collection is a resource for research by the public. Recent groups using collections include researchers from: 1) Centenary Church, a community landmark that burned to the ground four years ago, destroying all of its records, 2) **The Capital** newspaper conducting research for a series on local African American history, 3) The Four Rivers Heritage Area conducting research for a new audio tour of southern Anne Arundel County, 4) Discovery Village, a local environmental education center, working on plans to recreate the "Blessing of the Fleet," a historic tradition in the community, 5) A couple building a new home on an old home site, 6) Countless individuals researching family history, 7) An elementary student doing a class project on buy boats, 8) A start-up local history organization compiling

materials for a publication, 9) An author writing a novel set in the local area, and 10) A journalist researching a book on Chesapeake workboats and boat builders.

The Society is working hard to make its collections more accessible for future research through computerization of collections data, transcription of oral histories, and the re-organization of collections storage. Already an important resource for exhibits, education, and research, the collections hold potential for even greater use by the Society and the public in seeking to understand the social, cultural, economic, and environmental transformations that have shaped the Chesapeake Bay's Western Shore.

**D. What is the nature and mission of your organization?**

MISSION -- The Shady Side Rural Heritage Society operates a museum complex located at the historic Captain Salem Avery House in Shady Side – a watermen's community on Maryland's West River. The Society's mission is to preserve, collect, document, and share local history and culture, using its historic property as a lens through which to interpret the community's stories with a focus on the mid 19th century to the present. As an educational and cultural center for the local community and the general public, the Society fosters an understanding of the social, cultural, economic, and environmental transformations that have shaped the Chesapeake Bay's Western Shore since prehistoric times. (*Officially approved August 9, 2004.*)

The Society's mission is accomplished through: 1) educational programs; 2) interpretation of an historic site, the Captain Salem Avery House; 3) exhibitions, both on the grounds and in its exhibit and programming space; and 4) research, publications, and a library. The Shady Side peninsula and the communities surrounding it are primarily rural and underserved by humanities programs.

For its first 18 years the Society was staffed entirely by volunteers. In 2001 the Society hired a part-time director and in 2004 added an administrator (part-time) to its staff. More than 200 volunteers continue to contribute over 17,000 hours of time and expertise annually to its operations, and several fulfill, on a volunteer basis, professional staff functions, donating more than 500 hours of time each year to serve as financial manager, public relations coordinator, building and grounds superintendent, and membership coordinator.

Operating Budget (FY06):	[deleted]
Number of full-time staff members:	0
Number of part-time staff members:	2 (Director, 20 hrs/wk; Administrator, 15 hrs/wk)
Number of volunteers:	200
Schedule of open hours:	Sundays, 1-4 (April-December); Mondays, 12-3 Open for educational programs an additional 45-50 days/year. Additionally, open by appointment.

**E. Has your institution ever had a preservation or conservation assessment?**

In 2004 the Society received a Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) grant. Conservator Brian Ramer and preservation architect Thomas McGrath teamed up to survey the buildings and collections in December 2004 and submitted reports in February 2005. The CAP represented a turning point for the Society. As the first formal conservation assessment, results of the CAP Survey (in concert with goals defined in the Strategic Plan) have guided the Society's efforts to enhance access to and care of the Museum and Library Collections. The Society has worked hard to carry out recommendations of the CAP: 1) In March 2005 the Society launched a year-long

environmental monitoring program to record data on temperature and relative humidity in five locations using LCD data loggers (locations and equipment based on recommendations from CAP surveyor Brian Ramer). 2) A Long-Range Conservation Plan was adopted in September 2005 (*See attached overview*). 3) A Scope of Collections Statement was adopted in April 2006. 4) The Society worked with Ramer in 2006 to develop a collections storage plan – currently being implemented by SSRHS staff and volunteers. 4) The Society is in the midst of developing a disaster preparedness plan with consultant Arthur Dutil.

**F. What is the importance of this project to the institution?**

In recent years, the Society has made important strides forward in collections care and management -- focusing attention on both the condition of the objects themselves and the information known about them. Recommendations from a MAP I assessment completed in January 2001 have been instrumental in directing our efforts. In 2002 new collections forms were drafted and a collections storage/processing area was established. The Museum Collections were inventoried in 2003, and the Library Collections in 2004. A numbering system was established, artifacts were marked, and basic information about each item was entered into a Past Perfect database. In 2004 the Society also celebrated its 20th birthday and worked with museum consultant Leni Preston to develop a Strategic Plan. As a part of this project, the Society adopted a bold, new mission statement for the organization and clarified the parameters for its collecting efforts. The Society completed a CAP Survey in 2005. Drawing on the Strategic Plan and CAP recommendations, the Society crafted a “Scope of Collections” statement to direct collections decisions. In 2006 with support from NEH, SSRHS teamed up with collections conservator Brian Ramer on a reorganization of collections storage.

In conjunction with the CAP Survey, the SSRHS launched an environmental monitoring program in 2005 and now has on hand two years of temperature and relative humidity data for collections areas. The time is right to move forward to evaluate this data, assess the operation of the Museum’s HVAC system, develop recommendations and begin to improve the environment in which collections are stored and exhibited – a priority goal of the Society’s Long-Range Conservation Plan. Improving environmental conditions is critical to the preservation of the Society’s historical collections.

**G. What are the names and qualifications of the consultant(s) and staff involved in the project?**

Conservation consultant **Brian Ramer** will evaluate the environmental data and collaborate with the HVAC contractor on development of prioritized actions to improve climate conditions for the collections (*See attached letter and resume*). Mr. Ramer has worked in preventive conservation for more than 15 years. He has extensive experience in environmental control and monitoring, facility assessments and collection storage plans. In addition, he has conducted more than 100 general conservation surveys during his career, including the Shady Side Rural Heritage Society’s CAP in 2005. Society Director **Janet Surrett** will serve as project director for the storage plan (*See attached resume*). Surrett has 20 years of experience in the museum field, including collections care and management. She brings to the project experience with general conservation surveys, collections storage reorganization, and the development of long-range conservation plans. **Martin Knott, Jr.** of Knott Mechanical brings more than 16 years of experience in the heating, ventilation and air conditioning business (HVAC) to this project. Over his career, he has worked with many museums to design, install, service and maintain HVAC systems in areas where historical collections are stored and exhibited. His clients include the Jewish Museum of Maryland and the Maryland Historical Society. Mr. Knott is very familiar with the critical

importance of climate control in maintaining stable environments for museum collections as well as the need to balance the needs of the collections with the stability of the historic structure in places, like the Captain Salem Avery House Museum, where museum collections are housed in historic structures. Mr. Knott will be contributing his time to this environmental study. Following this project, when funds are in place, the Society will work with Mr. Knott to implement the recommendations for modifying the current HVAC system and improving the collections environment.

#### **H. What are the plan of work and timetable for the project?**

The project will be completed over a six-month period from February – August 2008 and will involve three main phases: 1) review and analysis of environmental data, 2) assessment of current climate control system, and 3) preparation of prioritized recommendations for improving the collections environment. The SSRHS Director will set up meetings with appropriate staff, board members and volunteers, and coordinate the scheduling of the phases to ensure the efficient use of the consultants' time and all essential institutional support.

##### Phase 1: Review and Analysis of Environmental Data

1. In February 2008, SSRHS staff will provide the collections conservator Brian Ramer with data on relative humidity and temperature collected over a two-year period by data loggers positioned in strategic locations throughout the Museum building. Data logger locations were chosen based on Ramer's CAP report.
2. Ramer will do a preliminary evaluation of the data in advance of his initial site visit.
3. On his initial site visit in March 2008, Ramer will conduct a brief assessment of the current condition of the collections and determination of their environmental needs. During this visit, Ramer will consult with the SSRHS staff and board on the Museum's future plans for exhibition and storage of the collections.
4. Ramer will evaluate the environmental information collected by the data loggers in light of information from the initial site visit, and prepare a brief report outlining findings and delineating recommendations for optimum climate conditions for various collections areas in the building. The report will summarize the findings of the evaluation, list strengths and weaknesses of current conditions, propose environmental parameters for the various collections housed in the building, and identify in general terms the types of mechanical equipment that could be used to improve conditions in the Museum. Part of the report will consider the application of low-tech methods of climate control. This report will be distributed in April 2008 to the project team: SSRHS staff and board, and HVAC contractor Martin Knott, Jr.

##### Phase 2: Assessment of Current Climate Control System

1. After review of Ramer's report, Knott and Ramer will visit the SSRHS in April/May 2008 to assess operation of the current HVAC system and consider various options for modifying the system to improve the collections environment as well as the efficiency of the HVAC system. The conservator and HVAC contractor will work together with SSRHS board and staff to reach agreement on appropriate design conditions for preservation of the collections. Design conditions will include relative humidity and temperature tolerances, such as safe maximum and minimum levels. Since the building (the Captain Salem Avery House Museum) is an historic structure, the team will also need to take into account the building's environmental characteristics and capabilities (e.g. feasibility of building-wide humidification in light of the nature of the building fabric).
2. Knott, Ramer and SSRHS board and staff will, in particular, consider:

- How well does and can the existing HVAC system keep temperature and relative humidity within acceptable ranges?
- How efficiently is the HVAC system working? Are there changes that could be made to improve its efficiency?
- What modifications or additions to the system are needed to improve (temperature/relative humidity) conditions for the collections -- taking into account human comfort (in that staff and volunteers work in most areas where collections are stored or are on display); rising utility costs; and the preservation needs of the historic building? What are the “outer limits” of climate control without putting the structure, and the collections, at risk?
- Are the staff and volunteers balancing/adjusting heat and air conditioning as well as is possible? Would the addition of programmable thermostats allow the SSRHS to improve operation of the HVAC system?

### Phase 3: Preparation of Prioritized Recommendations for Improving Collections Environment

1. HVAC contractor Martin Knott, Jr. will work together with Ramer to develop a list of prioritized actions to improve environmental conditions for the collections. This plan will include a proposal for modifications/additions to the existing HVAC system designed to improve temperature and relative humidity ranges in various parts of the building where collections are housed. This plan will include cost estimates as well as a detailed plan of work. This report will be submitted by August 1, 2008.

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