



# Idaho Association of Museums

## July 2010 Newsletter

***In this issue: The 2010 Annual Conference: learning, sharing, and good times together. Members of the Nampa Women’s Century Club pictured below, welcomed around 95 people from all over Idaho to this year’s annual conference. The Club’s elegant 1908 house was a lively place for presentations, discussions, networking, and great home-cooked food.***

**We sincerely thank The Idaho Humanities Council and the Idaho State Historical Society for providing support and participating in the conference.**

*The Idaho Humanities Council is a state-based program of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*



### **TAG consultants discussed how to create excellent exhibits**

*Barbara Bauer and Elizabeth Jacox began the conference by outlining the four elements necessary for creating the best exhibits possible.*

- 1. Reflect** on what stories you can build from your collection.
- 2. Plan** with attention to ideas and practical considerations.
- 3. Take action** to develop the storyline and exhibit statement, research, layout and design, and labels that link the text to the artifacts. Go beyond what the artifact is. Tell how it was used and the people behind it.
- 4. Maintain your exhibits** with regular inspections.

The TAG consultants applied this format in a case study of Jerome County Historical Society which is

planning new exhibits using the Minidoka War Relocation Center collection. The pending move into the vacated Jerome Depot gives the society an opportunity to design the space and create

### **Reflections on Idaho Museums**



*Keith Petersen is State Historian/Associate Director of the Idaho State Historical Society. His humorous and insightful luncheon talk is excerpted*

After recently traveling 3,500 miles to 30 museums,

I found that since my outreach work in 1989, Idaho has many more museums and some have been dramatically transformed. But many still have exhibits that can give visitors these static impressions of the past.

If all you knew about Idaho is what you see in many museums, you would think Idaho is all white. You can hear radio broadcasts in Spanish anywhere in Idaho, but Hispanics do not appear in our museums. And except for Scandinavians, hardly any ethnic groups have lived here. Indians might have been here long ago, but they have taken their tipis and moved on.

Exhibits show that we do all our shopping at quaint Mom and Pop stores. Shopko and Wal Mart—let alone those with Idaho roots like Albertsons—seem not to have discovered us. This view isn’t totally inaccurate because exhibits show an Idaho that only existed between 1870 and the end of World War II.

From the number of wedding

dress, it seems that lots of women got married in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But I'm not sure who they married because there's nothing to show that a groom was involved.

But the guys might not have had time for weddings. They were spending their time collecting massive tool collections, wiring them to pegboard to be donated to the local museum.

Exhibits show that children sat at wooden desks in one-room schools; families lived in fancy Victorian parlors, and "Mom" stood by the wood burning stove in the kitchen.

These exhibits tell visitors that there were no conflicts. No one left because they were unhappy or unable to find a job. No one lived in total poverty. Our communities were not affected by alcohol or drug problems, there was no discrimination, and the residents were for the most part young and vigorous and aged gracefully without pain or poverty.

**In rethinking our exhibits, let's not forget that the key word in history is STORY.** When you do a kitchen setting, tell the story of a real family in your area, how they used their wood cook store, and how an apple peeler works. If you do an exhibit on a store, tell the story of a local one.

**Let's not forget the difference between celebrate and commemorate.** Would we "celebrate" the Bear River Massacre? At one time we did, and an old historical marker describes the "heroism" of white soldiers who slaughtered women, children, and men indiscriminately. Today we would not celebrate the Minidoka internment camp nor the Aryan Nations compound. But it is appropriate to commemorate such events.

**Exhibits mostly begin with the collections we have.** If you do not have a scope of collections, get one fast. Move beyond passive



*Keith and Gini Woodward of Boundary County Historical Society, at the Friday night reception in the Union Pacific Depot museum.*

collecting: don't just accept and occasionally reject what comes through the door. The old piano you accept will take up space that will be needed for future accessions. You will be responsible for its maintenance, and its possible deterioration will reflect on you and maybe affect future donations.

#### **Here is a pledge we can all make.**

1. We will not be overwhelmed or discouraged when facing our old crowded exhibits. We can begin by changing one small area at a time and then invite the community to come see the results and share your vision for the future.

2. We will think about what draws people to our museum and not simply display the same "stuff" that visitors can find in museums all over the state.

3. We will not think of our museums as the community attic, but rather as educational institutions.

4. We will relieve our museums from clutter and allow artifacts the room they need to help tell the story.

5. To the extent that our budgets allow, we will replace the old department store display cases with new ones.

6. We will stop describing our exhibits as "displays," thus making a distinction between our interpretive, educational work and the local department store window.

7. We will not be hoodwinked into believing that the only way to modernize exhibits is by installing technological gadgetry and also recognize that "permanent exhibits" means about five to 10 years.

8. We will maintain space for temporary and traveling exhibits and contact the Idaho Humanities Council and the Smithsonian traveling exhibit programs for possible loans.

9. When we have a problem we will ask for help from our colleagues in the Idaho Association of Museums, the Idaho State Historical Society, the Idaho Heritage Trust, and the Idaho Humanities Council.

*We will not think of our museums as the community attic, but rather as educational institutions.*

10. We will not pin handwritten labels to clothing or use original photographs. We will keep exhibit cases clean and install UV light filters to protect artifacts. We will not intimidate visitors by giving them the impression that they have wandered into a private club. Instead, we will be friendly and inviting and encourage them to ask questions.

11. We will visit large and small museums to get new ideas and inspiration for our own exhibits.

12. As an immediate goal, we will replace our old handwritten or typewritten labels with ones generated by a computer and printer to give a professional look to our museum.

14. We will not be afraid of presenting controversial subjects and we will not collect and exhibit items that are not part of our history.

15. We will have fun and enjoy what we do, whether we are volunteers or paid staff. When astonished people ask if we get paid for what we do, we will take this as a compliment because we have found a job that is pleasant, rewarding, fun, and can make a dramatic impact on people's lives.

*Michael Vogt, curator at the Basque*

## Hidden in Plain Sight: The Basques

*Museum and Cultural Center, described a recent exhibit project. .*

**The exhibit, *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Basques* was created as a temporary exhibit for the Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York City.** During the three months it was open, February through May, an estimated 300,000 visitors came through.

This exhibition examines early Basque immigrants who traveled through Ellis Island during the height of American immigration in the early 1900s. From one of the first boarding houses in New York City, to those established in Idaho, Utah, and Nevada, we show the importance of these temporary homes in the life of the Basque immigrant.

The exhibit highlights famous Basques throughout history, Basque influence in the United States, and Basque cultural traditions.

*Hidden in Plain Sight* looks at the widespread influence of the Basques and the North American Basque Organization. The exhibit includes a video of Lucy Garatea, a Boise Basque, now age 105, telling her story of coming through Ellis Island in 1920 as a fifteen-year-old girl.

A portion of the exhibit is dedicated to modern day Basque institutions, the government in the Basque Country, and educational institutions, including the Basque Studies Program at Boise State University, the Center for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada – Reno, and Boiseko Ikastola, the Basque immersion preschool in Boise.

The exhibit was developed in conjunction with the Boise State University Basque Studies Center. It received major funding from the Basque Autonomous Government and additional support from the Idaho Humanities Council, the Idaho State Historical Society, and a generous group of private donors. The Boise exhibits firm, Catapult 3, designed and fabricated it. It will open at the Basque Museum & Cultural



*The photo shows part of the Basque exhibit, Hidden in Plain Sight.*

Center in Boise on September 24, 2010.

## Making the “Ordinary” Remarkable

*Mary Reed, former director of Latah County Historical Society, discussed some ways to connect collections to local history.*

**During my tenure at the historical society we developed ways to connect ordinary and common artifacts with local history in our exhibits.**

We designed one small exhibit using vintage hats for our museum and for a downtown window. We used scanned photos and descriptions from our mail order catalogues to highlight different decades that corresponded to the hats. But going a step further—and to have some fun—we coupled each with a song of that era. I scanned lyrics (found on the internet) onto a scanned image of a sheet of music, and then added the photo and information of the price,

materials, and style.

Selections of lyrics ranged from the 1934 *Summertime* to the 1970s Ricky Nelson song, *Garden Party*.



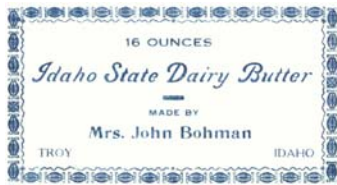
**Another challenge was using our collection of kitchenware** for an exhibit at the country courthouse which had to be done fairly quickly. Here we wanted to tie the artifacts to our museum and add some local history. This was important as many who passed through the building didn't know about us.

The two main labels for *Someone's in the Kitchen* featured two formidable ladies who were the first occupants of the McConnell Mansion. The label with their photographs connected them to the kitchen, household duties, and artifacts like a cast iron skillet.

Other devices we used were scanned images from the mail order catalogs with drawings and



descriptions of the same artifacts on exhibit. We described the new and changing technology of gadgets like grinders and food mills, different types of butter churns with a butter wrapper from a local farmwoman. In talking about food preparation we included recipes from a vintage local cookbook.



We illustrated changes in apron styles, fabrics, colors, and uses through real aprons and those found in the mail order catalogs, ending with a 1960s completely color-coordinated kitchen.

It was visually interesting, educational, and connected viewers with our museum and our mission through simple, everyday items and routines.

**The third exhibit, *Wedding Memories of Latah County*, involved our collection of wedding dresses, a ubiquitous item in most every museum.** This ambitious exhibit extended through the whole house, from the master bedroom to the dining room. Using oral histories, newspaper clippings, reminiscences, photographs, the mail order catalogs (again!), and a selection of dresses from early years to more recent ones, we brought together personal histories with the fascination of ritual and beauty of the textiles.

A favorite artifact and the accompanying story was of a World War II wedding where the

dress was made from parachute silk. The bride, now a grandmother, and her family were special guests at the opening.

The Victorian house was a perfect setting for interpreting the wedding luncheon in the dining room, complete with a cake and place settings; the bride's room with her undergarments laid out on the bed and her trousseau and going away clothes on the chair nearby; a scene in the parlor with a story of the real wedding that took place here. The centerpiece of the exhibit offered stories and artifacts of three generations of weddings.



*The bride's bedroom section with articles for a trousseau and honeymoon. The 1941 parachute silk dress is reflected in the mirror.*

## Bridging the Old and the New

*Barbara Coyner, a member of the representing the Potlatch and Latah County Historical Societies and the Latah County Historic Preservation Commission, had these reflections on the conference.*

**He's after the "Wow!" factor, Jim McReynolds stressed, as he presented his touch-screen virtual exhibit.** McReynolds, Executive Director at the Wallace District Mining Museum, added, "Right now, I've got my grandfather's museum. I want my grandkids' museum." The quote served as a general theme during the two-day event at the historic Women's Century Club.

But just how do museums attract the younger generation, so firmly attached to cell phones and video screens, while at the same time not intimidating older less tech-savvy history lovers? Idaho State Historian Keith Petersen had the key: tell your local story.

Petersen emphasized moving beyond passive collections to active collections. "Develop your story line, then go after the artifacts," he advised. "Too often we get bogged down with collecting, taking the path of least resistance. But if we accept something, that has consequences. Can we care for things? We have to pledge that we won't be overwhelmed. We are a museum, not a community attic. We have to relieve our museums of clutter."

Drawn to McReynolds's touch screen setup, it was easy to see the value of virtual exhibits in telling the story while eliminating clutter. The screen featured flexibility, and fascinating text and photos, appropriately centering on the famous Fire of 1910, which observes its 100th year anniversary this fall. Viewers could learn more in-depth, reading at their own pace, and the virtual exhibit even had a question and answer feature, making learning more personalized. They could also adjust the size of photos just by moving their hands over the screen. Talk about the "Wow!" factor.



*Gaetha Pace of the Idaho Heritage Trust, tries out the touch screen.*

Yet equally engaging was the story-telling ability of Peg Roberson of Jerome as she highlighted that area's



*ISHS trustees Earl Bennett and Tom Blanchard and Wendy Miller, Canyon County Historical Society Director, at the Friday night reception.*

history with the Minidoka Japanese internment camp. Peg admitted that she shies away from computers in her museum work, but she's clearly invested in the stories of her community. Who wouldn't want to know more about the daily lives of the Japanese herded into that desolate region of Idaho? The story of a Japanese band playing at the local prom is truly a one-of-a-kind story worth welling.

As Wendy Miller, Museum Director at Canyon County Historical Society and Museum, led a walking tour through downtown Nampa, people related their own community stories. Creative juices flowed as people from Boise connected with people from Bonners Ferry, and bigger cities compared notes with small towns.

Amidst the success stories was the all-too-familiar thread of working with bare-bones budgets.

"The road department gets the money, we get the bake sales," ISHS Board of Trustees President Tom Blanchard quipped. "We have to work together. It's critical we have strong partnerships in the heritage community."

The role of partnerships can't be underestimated, and at the conclusion of my presentation on the restoration of the Potlatch depot, I got my own taste of

potential partnership as Marianne Oxley and Meg Davis talked to me of their challenges in Emmett. Emmett and Potlatch have much in common with their timber heritage and new role as bedroom community. Yet as Meg recounted a previous museum director's fundraising line, "Remember your roots," I thought how appropriate that line is for all museums. Whether we present our story via touch screen, static exhibit or human voice, the key is to get up close and personal: remember YOUR roots. What better way to welcome museum visitors into our museums!

### Thoughts about the IAM conference from new board member Jim McReynolds

*Jim has a background of 25 years in a variety of administrative, teaching, and defense work in the military. He is also a member of the National Ski Patrol. In his three years of directing the Wallace District Mining Museum, he has initiated a four-year project to digitize collections and design virtual exhibits, all using Pastperfect software. He emphasizes collaboration in his work and invites those who are interested in his digital project to contact him.*

This was my first IAM conference which I felt was well worth the investment in both time and money. I walked away with several pages of notes on constructive ideas from a wide variety of sources and shared experiences. My favorite aspect was meeting, listening to, and interacting with fellow practitioners in collecting and telling the stories of our Idaho heritage.

From my perspective, the conference took the approach of presenting "best practices," or in some cases examples of what to avoid. Many sessions directly addressed issues we've encountered or are currently grappling with. I feel I'm now in a much better

position to effectively deal with some of them.

It was a distinct pleasure to meet and spend time with people who share a common passion. And, I found that it was in this spirit and atmosphere of sharing where the "real value added" of the conference was achieved.



As a relative rookie to the museum business I've always been a history buff. In my 25 years of traveling around and living all across the nation, and in some exotic locations, I've full advantage of visiting museums and historical sites, including six years in our nation's capital.

I've had a lot to learn and am still learning. This is the strength of belonging to and participating in IAM.

A big debt of gratitude is owed to Wendy Miller and her staff at the Canyon County Historical Society and Museum for hosting the conference. They provided us with a great venue and kept us well fed. I'm highly motivated by food. I look forward to continuing my association and participation with IAM well into the future.

### Ideas Blooming with Questions Answered

*Becky Smith is Executive Director of The National Oregon/California Trail Center at Montpelier, Idaho.*

**The IAM conference was a turning point for the Center.** We learned to take what has been so graciously

donated to our collections and bring them to life by telling a story of the artifacts by emphasizing the local human connection. We also learned that planning and research are keys to a successful exhibit, and as historical societies and museums we should update and refresh our exhibits to give the visitor something to look forward to and to encourage multiple visitations.

Using modern technology to appeal to the younger visitors as a way of interesting the younger generation in history. Many new web-based programs are available for cataloging and virtual display.

State Historian Keith Petersen tactfully and humorously reminded us that it is important that we update exhibits regularly so we won't be remembered just for our doctors, blacksmiths, and twilight zone mannequins.

Tom Blanchard, Chair of the Idaho State Historical Society Board told how the State Historical Society has undergone changes to provide more services to the public and other museums.

One of the most helpful sessions was conducted by the Idaho Humanities Council, Idaho State Historical Society and the Idaho Heritage Trust. This session give ideas on how to apply for grant funding for our projects. I was most impressed with the willingness for these entities to talk one on one with the applicant and then to help them edit and refine their grant application for success. These entities truly want us to succeed!

I really enjoyed the presentations from directors, presidents and members of other historical societies sharing their projects and exhibits and their struggles, frustrations, and eventual successes. The conference answered many of the questions I had when I came to the conference.

As participants we were richly rewarded with a walking tour of historical downtown Nampa. What an inspiration to see how city government and historical societies can work together. We also enjoyed a tour of the

Nampa train depot. What a spectacular building.

I came home refreshed, renewed and refocused by just visiting with others in my field. Many ideas and projects are blooming in my garden of historical presentations and exhibits.

Many thanks to the IAM, and the Idaho Humanities Council for sponsoring this event and for the travel stipend from the IAM. awarding me the stipend to come. I came away from this conference appreciating and realizing just how much the IAM does for us. To the ladies of the Nampa Women's Century Club, my heartfelt thanks. These ladies were so helpful, considerate and attentive to our needs. Their food was a five star experience. *Happy Trails!*



**The Idaho State Historical Society will once again have a Community Enrichment Grants Program.** Funds can be used for a wide diversity of projects, including exhibits, collections management, and heritage tourism. Grant guidelines and application materials will be available the first week in July. You may download the application information from the Historical Society's website at [www.idahohistory.net](http://www.idahohistory.net). or contact Keith Petersen, Associate Director/ State Historian, 112 W. 4th Street, Suite 7, Moscow, ID 83843, 208-882-1540. The email address is [keith.petersen@ishs.idaho.gov](mailto:keith.petersen@ishs.idaho.gov). The application deadline will be approximately mid-September.

**SHRAB grants are another source of funding.** Last month we emailed



*Conference participants gathering in front of the Union Pacific Depot for the downtown walking tour.*

so this is a reminder to consider for next year as the 2010 deadline is June 30.

The Board offers community grants for the identification, protection, preservation, digitalization, and increased public access to historical records. Grants are awarded to qualifying institutions and organizations to improve public access to historical materials, help organizations adopt standard archival practices, and increase the public's awareness and appreciation of the archival community.

Additional information and applications are available at the website [www.idahohistory.net/shrab](http://www.idahohistory.net/shrab). For information for next year you can contact Carter L. Wilson III, Deputy Coordinator, by email at [idahoshrab@q.com](mailto:idahoshrab@q.com) or by phone at 208-853-74

**And here are two more sources for funding:**

**The Idaho Humanities Council at 1-888-345-5346 or at [www.idahohumanities.org](http://www.idahohumanities.org).**

**Idaho Heritage Trust, at the website [www.idahoheritage.org](http://www.idahoheritage.org).**

## IAM Officers and Representatives by Region



*Board meeting in Nampa. From left: Kelsey Salsbery, Ann Curtis, Patty Miller, Jim McReynolds, Mary Reed, and Lyle Wirtanen.*

### **Alyse Cadez, President, North**

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### **Mary Reed, Vice-Pres., Newsletter**

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### **Laurie Baker, Treasurer, Southwest**

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### **Ann Ferguson, North**

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### **Lyle Wirtanen, North**

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### **Jim McReynolds, North**

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### **Reed Phillips, Southeast**

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### **Patty Miller, Rep. At-Large**

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pattyam@basquemuseum.com



**If you are not a current member of the Idaho**

**Association of Museums**, this is your invitation to join. Please fill out the membership form and mail to our treasurer, Laurie Baker, Eagle Historical Museum, 67 East State Street, Eagle 83616. Thanks!

And thanks to those who are members. We greatly appreciate your support!

## Idaho Association of Museums

We invite you to join or renew your membership in the Idaho Association of Museums. We are a non-profit organization dedicated to the education and advancement of Idaho museums. Membership offers many benefits:

- \* IAM Newsletter three times a year
- \* Annual conferences and workshops
- \* Travel stipends
- \* Museum assessment mini-grants
- \* State and regional advocacy
- \* Web site with links to member museums

Become a new institutional and/or individual member, renew your current membership, or invite a colleague or friend to join by filling out this form and sending it with your payment to:

**Laurie Baker, IAM Treasurer, Eagle Historical Museum, 67 East State Street, Eagle, ID 83616**

Please make your check payable to the Idaho Association of Museums.

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual (\$10 per membership)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Institution	<u>Dues</u> <u>Annual Budget</u>
	\$15    up to \$5,000
	\$20    \$5,001 - \$25,000
	\$30    \$25,001 - \$50,000
	\$50    Over \$50,000

I/we wish to make an additional contribution

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Type of membership:  Individual     Institutional

Amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your support!



**c/o Kelsey Salsbery  
Museum of Idaho  
200 N. Eastern Ave.  
Idaho Falls, ID 83402**