

## **ADVOCATES FOR NEW JERSEY HISTORY**

### **PLATFORM FOR NEW JERSEY HISTORY**

The Advocates for New Jersey History is a statewide organization, which is comprised of individuals and organizations representing the entire history community. The History Advocates' goal is for public history in New Jersey to benefit and educate residents of New Jersey and attract tourists and visitors to the state through the presentation of the highest quality public history programming and facilities. The History Advocates seek enactment of measures to ensure that New Jersey's historical and cultural assets maximize their potential to contribute to the state's economic development and enhance its quality of life by:

- Increasing growth of the cultural heritage tourism industry
- Improving education about our common history for students of all ages
- Preserving our cultural heritage
- Increasing awareness of the special role of New Jersey in the nation's history.

We also seek to secure sustainable funding, providing renewable resources to ensure that heritage tourism fulfills its economic development potential.

#### **A. SUPPORT NEW JERSEY PUBLIC HISTORY SERVICES**

1. The grant programs of the **New Jersey Historical Commission** provide crucial funding for history museums, historic sites, county cultural and heritage agencies, archives and libraries in every corner of the state, with new organizations applying each year. This funding leverages critical private dollars. The Commission is also the primary source of funding for significant historical research and publications about New Jersey. The History Advocates urge that the Historical Commission's grant budget, which has sustained disproportionate cuts, be increased from the current \$4 million (which covers less than half of applicant needs) to \$8 million.
2. The **New Jersey Cultural Trust** provides important support for capacity building and preservation projects for history organizations through its grant programs. The History Advocates urge that the State fulfill its statutory mandate and resume funding the Cultural Trust at the rate of \$10 million a year as promised in the original legislation. The History Advocates also urge that the State restore the Cultural Trust's administrative budget line so that it can field the staff it needs to carry out its important programs.

#### **B. PRESERVE OUR HISTORIC RESOURCES**

1. The History Advocates urge that funding for the **New Jersey Historic Trust** be continued and increased through the Garden State Preservation Trust program or other means with stable and permanent funding. Only then can the Historic Trust continue its crucial work as the primary funder for public and non-profit historic preservation projects

throughout the state. Unless historic sites and venues are prepared for tourism, our multi-million dollar industry will be crippled.

2. The History Advocates urge the adoption of the **New Jersey Historic Properties Reinvestment Act**, a state tax incentive that will stimulate private investment in historic residences and commercial buildings, thereby generating significant private sector investment in revitalizing New Jersey's cities, towns and communities.
3. The History Advocates urge the development of a user-friendly (Geographic Information Systems-based) **Historic Asset Inventory** of New Jersey's most valuable historic assets (such as buildings, sites and landscapes) to inform and expedite public and private development decision-making.

### **C. PROMOTE CULTURAL & HERITAGE TOURISM**

1. The History Advocates urge that separate funding be provided through the New Jersey Historic Trust for constructing modern visitor amenities at historic sites, so that they can effectively attract, welcome and educate the public and comply with federal, state and local codes for public access and safety.
2. The History Advocates urge the creation of a comprehensive Highway Wayfinding (Signage) Program for Cultural & Heritage Attractions to guide visitors from major highways to the doorsteps of cultural sites.
3. To enable New Jersey's important historic attractions to compete effectively in the regional and national marketplace, the History Advocates urge \$1 million in funding for a Heritage Tourism Grant Initiative, administered by the New Jersey Historical Commission.
4. To help educate residents and visitors about New Jersey's rich history, the History Advocates urge the creation of a statewide Historic Marker Program, to be administered by the New Jersey Historical Commission.

### **D. DEVELOP AND SUPPORT NEW JERSEY'S STATE-OWNED HISTORIC SITES**

1. The History Advocates welcome the recent allocation of the Corporate Business Tax to provide State-owned historic sites a dedicated source of funding to address decades of neglect. However, the \$15 million a year barely scratches the surface of needed infrastructure and visitor amenity improvements. Realizing that State Government cannot do this alone, the History Advocates urge that the **procedures for the leasing of historic sites to non-profits be streamlined** and other stewardship models be considered and adopted to facilitate allowing outside entities to operate and assist in maintaining State-owned historic properties.

2. To bring the State-owned historic sites alive for the visiting public, the History Advocates urge the funding of a **Staffing Initiative** that would fill vacant positions and increase the quantity of experienced historic site staff.
3. In order to track progress with both of these initiatives, the History Advocates urge the creation of a **Uniform Reporting Method** within the Division of Parks and Forestry/DEP, to show construction and staffing progress at State-owned historic sites.

#### **E. EDUCATE OUR CHILDREN ABOUT NEW JERSEY**

1. The New Jersey Department of Education's new core curriculum content standards require the teaching of New Jersey history at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. So that teachers can educate their students in this important subject, the History Advocates urge that a **Course in New Jersey History** be required as a part of the certification requirements for teachers.
2. Also to meet the core curriculum content standards, the History Advocates urge that the New Jersey Historical Commission be given the resources to enable that agency to prepare **Lesson Plans, Texts, and other Age-Appropriate Curriculum Material** to assist teachers in educating their students about the history of our state, and that this material be distributed to all schools and school libraries in a variety of formats, including both on-line and printed material.
3. The Encyclopedia of New Jersey, published in book form in 2004, is an important educational reference tool. The History Advocates urge that the **Encyclopedia of New Jersey be developed into an Internet Website** so that it can be continuously updated and expanded as an educational resource for students, scholars and the general public, as is done with state encyclopedias in several other states. A consortium of New Jersey state agencies and nonprofit organizations should undertake this work, with the support of a legislative appropriation.
4. The History Advocates urge that the **separate New Jersey State History standards for grades K-12** should be reinstated when the core curriculum standards are renewed in 2008.
5. The History Advocates urge that the Board of the New Jersey Department of Education recognize that New Jersey law requires two years of U.S. History (including New Jersey and African-American history) and amend NJAC 6A:8 to require this as a **high school graduation requirement**, bringing administrative code into compliance with statute.

#### **F. SUPPORT THE RENEWAL OF THE NEW JERSEY STATE MUSEUM**

1. The History Advocates urge support for the **changes to the galleries and programs of the New Jersey State Museum**. The Advocates look forward to supporting and promoting the presentation of this area's story including the Age of Dinosaurs, the archaeological record of Native Americans, New Jersey's role in the American and

Industrial Revolutions, and its diverse peoples whose industry and artistry have always been at the forefront of American history.

2. The History Advocates urge that the New Jersey State Museum's **legislative appropriation for operations, staffing, and programs be increased** to levels commensurate with the size of its collections and buildings so that it can advance its mission of educating the public about the natural and cultural heritage of New Jersey. The museum will thus be positioned to leverage this public investment and become competitive with other comparable museums in raising private funds and developing public/private partnerships.

## **G. SUPPORT THE PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC HISTORY COLLECTIONS**

1. The History Advocates urge support for preservation of, and improved access to, New Jersey's rich historical research collections. Specifically, the Advocates recommend budget language enabling the **Division of Archives and Records Management (DARM) to fully utilize the New Jersey Public Records Preservation Account** established by P.L. 2003, c. 117, including the 60% dedicated for strategic improvements to the infrastructure of State-level records programs. This funding source supports document imaging, electronic filing and records management systems; document conservation; preservation of "born-digital" documents; planning of storage and research facilities; staffing for arrangement, description, digitization and indexing of archives and library collections; and exhibition and publication of materials from collections throughout the state. Specific funding and staff are needed to develop web resources for New Jersey history, including databases and guides to collections, and resources for teaching New Jersey history (such as the New Jersey Digital Highway).
2. The History Advocates urge that funding for DARM's Public Archives and Records Infrastructure Support (**PARIS) Grants Program be restored to 40% of all fees collected** under P.L. 2003, c. 117, to continue strategic improvements to the operational and facilities infrastructure of county and local government archives and records management programs.
3. The History Advocates urge restoration of the **State Library's Maintenance and Preservation of Library Collections Grant Program** to fund projects that stabilize or improve the condition of library and archival materials of statewide historical, cultural or social significance. The funding level for this program should be at least \$300,000. Similarly, the **State Library's Digitization Grant Program** should continue to support digitization of primary sources held by libraries, archives, historical societies and museums throughout the state. This program expands public access to valuable research sources via the internet, and ensures the survival of original materials by eliminating the need for physical handling. Annual funding for this program, likewise, should be at least \$300,000.

4. The History Advocates urge an **overhaul of the State's public records statutes** (Title 47) to reflect 21st century advances in recordkeeping technology, and modern imperatives for improved records access and administration under the Open Public Records Act. Specific legislation providing a sunset on statutory and other access restrictions to historical public records is needed. The Advocates propose an 80-year limit on all such restrictions, except when a record relates to a minor, in which case a 100-year limit would apply.
5. The History Advocates urge support for expanded and unrestricted research **access to historical birth, marriage and death records** through transfer of the records to the State Archives from the Department of Health's Bureau of Vital Statistics. The Advocates join the Genealogical Society of New Jersey and the State Historical Records Advisory Board in recommending scheduled transfers to the Archives of all birth records over 100 years old, marriage records over 75 years old, and death records over 50 years old. To properly administer these records, the Archives will require additional staff, equipment, facilities enhancements, and funding for conservation and access improvements.