

## **Meeting Notes**

COSTEP-CT met June 15, 2011 at the Barnum Museum, Bridgeport, CT.

Present: Kathy Craughwell-Varda (Conservation ConneCTion); Jane Cullinane (Conn. State Library, Preservation Office); Mark Jones (CSL, Archives); Robert Novak (Consultant); Lizette Pelletier (CSL, Public Records Office); Liz Shapiro (Connecticut League of Historical Organizations); Adrienne Saint-Pierre (Barnum Museum); Kathy Maher (Barnum Museum, Executive Director and Curator). Note taker: Lizette.

Paul O'Pecko who has replaced Dana Hewson as the Steering Committee representative from Mystic Seaport was not able to attend the meeting.

## **HOST INSTITUTION**

Thank you to Kathy Maher and her staff for hosting the meeting.

## **NHPRC SNAP GRANT STATUS UPDATE**

Kathy Craughwell-Varda updated the group on the up-coming SNAP grant which will begin July 1. Mark stated that the funds should be available in early August. He will have the PSAs for Lori Foley and Kathy drawn up and ready to submit for approval as soon as the funds are released. He has tentatively scheduled a joint meeting with SHRAB and Lori Foley in late September. The regional meetings should be able to start in October.

There will be five regional mutual aid groups. We are need of meeting locations that can accommodate approximately 50 people. Kathy recommended that we try to select sites that have experienced a disaster event or that have a strong disaster preparedness program such as Mystic Seaport.

Looking at a copy of the [DEMHS region map](#), the committee suggested the following potential locations:

Region 1: Barnum Museum

Region 2: The Ethnic Archives at Southern Connecticut State University; the Connecticut River Museum; Deep River Historical Society or Madison Historical Society. The library at SCSU experienced a flood during construction a few years ago and the Connecticut River Museum recently had a fire.

Region 3: Keeney Cultural Center in Wethersfield; the Butler McCook House; The Barn at the Webb Deane Stevens House; the Hartford History Center at the Hartford Public Library; West Hartford Public Library; Windsor Historical Society or Rocky Hill Historical Society. The Keeney had a fire that damaged part of the building. The Butler McCook House was severely damaged when a drunk driver drove into the building.

Region 4: Mystic Seaport. The seaport has a strong disaster plan in place which they recently revised. Kathy Craughwell-Varda will contact the museum.

Region 5: Litchfield Historical Society. They have a strong disaster plan and have been very supportive by hosting earlier workshops.

Liz Shapiro and Kathy Craughwell-Varda will work on the locations and scheduling dates. Lizette Pelletier will work on her contacts at DEMHS to get them actively involved.

#### **STATUS OF STATEWIDE CONTRACT FOR DISASTER RECOVERY SERVICES**

Jane reported that the contract is still in RFP development phase. When possible, she or Lizette will post existing state contract information to COSTEP-CT website. There are existing contracts for hazardous materials removal including mold abatement as well as general library and archival supplies. Jane will give Kathy M and Liz the links. Liz will include the links in her next CLHO email blast.

Jane and Mark participated in a recent Library Congress webinar regarding federal disaster contracts. Their contracts require that a certain amount of money is attached to use on short notice to get materials stabilized until the final treatment decisions can be made.

#### **BARNUM MUSEUM TORNADO EXPERIENCE**

Kathy Maher reported on the Barnum's experience with the tornado which was a year ago this month. She showed a brief video that was made shortly after the tornado. The staff had flip camera that they had recently purchased to take advantage of social media sites to promote the museum. It proved to be the best investment as they were able to document the aftermath.

Kathy explained that although they had an extensive disaster plan that included a potential tornado, there was no way they were remotely prepared for the reality. This report can not accurately convey the extent of damage and profound impact this event has had on the institution and the staff. Their ability to respond to the disaster was complicated by the trauma of the event and many factors that were way beyond their control, including

- the building is owned by the city and the collections are owned by the Barnum Foundation
- the tornado blew tiny shards of glass, brick dust and dirt throughout the building, which was then spread by the HVAC system
- Rain entered the building through the broken windows, and was pushed in through the frames of closed doors and flooded the basement, leading to a mold outbreak and a sudden spike in humidity. The resulting "hydrosopic shock" caused damage such as swelling of the wood in some of the artifacts which lead to the original paint peeling from the artifact
- The subtle damage done to priceless historic artifacts can easily be overlooked or disregarded by insurance adjusters whose normal response to a homeowner's disaster would be to replace rather than restore a set of china, or replace or repair a structure rather than restore it with historical methods and materials.

The disaster did not qualify for FEMA assistance; the insurance has not been resolved; prior renovations to the original part of the building that were badly done exacerbated the long-term effects and the delays have led to additional damage to the building. It turns out the city's property insurance policy was undervalued by half and the property insurance company has been very difficult to work with. The appraisers from the fine arts insurance company were not well versed about artifacts and museum materials. It has been nearly twelve months and they have not received any insurance payments.

Kathy has had a lot of support from the community and local politicians are also supportive. Linda McMahon has quietly supported with a donation from the McMahon foundations and contact information for the Barnum and Bailey Entertainment Group. Maria Buford, the Director of Emergency Management at Yale has been very helpful. She and Kathy M. are working on a training video to help other institutions based on her experiences.

The group discussed the flaws of the FEMA process which requires so much effort on the part of applicants with only a small chance of success. While the FEMA staff associated with COSTEP-CT is supportive and helpful, many other obstacles remain within that agency. The cultural community needs to lobby our officials to try to stream line the process and make it more relevant.

Kathy led a tour of the museum and office spaces. They have made very slow progress. COSTEP-CT members will share any information that we have now or learn in the future with her and her staff.

**NEXT MEETING:** to be announced