

SUMMERLEE COMMISSION ON THE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF HISTORY ORGANIZATIONS

SUMMARY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



A Joint Project of the Summerlee Foundation and Dallas Heritage Village

Coordinated by Gary N. Smith

October 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page 2	Introduction and Purpose of Study
Page 6	Sustaining Organizations Through Best Practices and New Approaches
Page 21	History As A Third World Country: Why History is Difficult to Sustain
Page 28	Characteristics of Unsustainable Organizations
Page 32	Before You Open It: A Checklist for Planning New Museums in Historic Buildings
Page 37	If It Is Time To Close It: Considerations For Dissolving An Organization
Page 42	References and Notes
Page 44	Are You Sustainable: A Self-Directed Assessment Tool
Page 50	Commission Roster and Contact Email Addresses

Cover photograph by Lois Lehman, Dallas Heritage Village

****Note: Our intention with this manual is that it be disseminated widely, but when doing so, please credit: Gary N. Smith, the Summerlee Foundation, and Dallas Heritage Village.***

Introduction and Purpose of Study

The Summerlee Foundation, founded in 1989, has two missions: supporting animal welfare, and the sustainment and advancement of Texas history. Since then, the Summerlee Foundation has made grants totaling more than sixteen million dollars in support of Texas history projects.¹

The trustees of the Foundation share concern for the well-being of Texas history organizations. While many history organizations conduct important work by collecting and interpreting Texas history, they often do so in a precarious financial position. In response to this concern, the Foundation appointed the Summerlee Commission on History Organization Sustainability in 2014 to study the issue of financial sustainability. From this study, the Commission created recommendations to ensure the work of the organization and the care of important historical collections will survive for future generations.

Appointed chair, Gary Smith, assembled a group of history professionals from around the state with many decades of experience among them. The Commission consists of Bob Bluthardt with Fort Concho National Historic Landmark, Houston McGaugh with the Star of the Republic Museum, Jack McKinney with the Dr Pepper Museum and Free Enterprise Institute, Ruth Ann Rugg with the Texas Association of Museums, Carolyn Spears with the Stone Fort Museum, Stephanie Turnham with the Kerrville Museum of Western Art, and Cliff Vanderpool with the Panhandle Plains Historical Museum.

The Commission began work in January 2014 and quickly agreed that many history organizations in Texas, regardless of location, are struggling for survival. This struggle is evident despite the incredible enthusiasm and effort that both volunteers and professionals bring to their

¹ “Welcome to the Summerlee Foundation,” *The Summerlee Foundation*, accessed August 26, 2015, www.summerlee.org.

organizations. Hard working people who are dedicated to their missions govern and manage Texas history organizations. Yet, dedication and hard work are not enough to guarantee sustainability. History museums, historical societies, and preservation organizations still struggle for audience and financial support.

Why do so many organizations struggle? We believe special circumstances make financial sustainability more difficult for history organizations than for other disciplines. It is important to discuss these special circumstances, because the public has trouble understanding why so many history organizations struggle financially in a culture that overtly values history. American culture supports the founding of countless state, county, and city history museums; television's History Channel is extremely popular; and almost everyone (especially Texans) claims to value their heritage. For volunteers and professionals toiling in the field, these superficial indications of history's popularity can be discouraging when their own organization is struggling. The Commission listened to discouragement expressed in such questions as "Why can't we get more people to come to our museum?" "Why is it so hard to get new people to join our board?" "Why is it so hard to raise money?" and finally, "What are we doing wrong?"

We do not believe that most organizations are doing anything wrong. However, there are things that most organizations can do better. This report contains both blunt assessments of the current situation for organizations and practical suggestions for improvement. Yet, we also want to give encouragement by spotlighting some of the extraordinary difficulties that those working in history have to overcome. The Commission stands in admiration for those working in the field, whether as professionals or volunteers.

Along with this encouragement comes practical advice for our history colleagues. One of the problems that history organizations have is the sheer numbers of such organizations. Often

these exist within the same community and each competes for audience and funding. We are concerned that there are too many organizations for all of them to remain sustainable.

The Commission is also concerned about the insufficient planning that often presages the founding of new organizations. For these reasons, the following sections are included in this document: “Characteristics of Unsustainable Organizations,” and the “Before You Open It: A Checklist for Opening New Museums in Historic Buildings.” We hope that our regular constituents will read these sections and share them with city planners, convention bureau employees, chamber of commerce leaders, city council members, county commissioners, as well as park department employees who may be required to plan new history museums.

For those looking for new approaches to sustainability, we have included discussion of mergers, collaborations, new business models, and hallmarks of successful, sustainable organizations in the section called “Sustaining Organizations Through Best Practices and New Approaches.” Finally, for those organizations who wish to shut down their operations responsibly, we have included the chapter on “If It’s Time to Close It.”

Who should read this manual?

- Trustees, volunteers, and professional staff members who work with any Texas historical museum, historical society, preservation group, library, or archives that struggles for financial sustainability.
- Community leaders serving on city councils, county commissions, park departments, and other agencies that frequently end up planning new history museums, whether by design or default.

- Financial supporters of historical organizations, including members of city and county governments, responsible for funding decisions and who need guidance in evaluating the relative strength of groups applying for funding.

In conducting this study, chairman Gary Smith visited many regions of the state, toured countless museums and historical societies, held public forums, and visited with trustees, staff, and volunteers. Other commission members contributed their decades of invaluable experience working in Texas history organizations by assisting with the setup of community forums, participating in commission meetings, and helping to read and edit this manual. We all join in saluting our Texas history colleagues, and hope that this manual is of service to them.

Finally, we want to offer our gratitude to Summerlee Foundation President, John Crain, and Founding President, David Jackson, for their advice and support; Dr. Ron Tyler, Michael Duty, Lisa Anderson, and Laura Casey, for reading and critiquing early drafts of the report; Melissa Prycer and the Dallas Heritage Village, for their logistical support and advice; and Sarah Hambric, for serving as copy editor.

Sustaining Organizations through Best Practices and New Approaches

What do we mean by the term “sustainable, and what makes a historical organization sustainable? Merriam-Webster defines sustainable as ‘able to be used without being completely used up or destroyed;’² and “able to last or continue for a long time.” For our purposes, we will take that definition and apply it this way: *a sustainable organization is one that, through beneficial circumstances and good professional practices, generates enough financial and community support to guarantee its continued existence on an indefinite basis.*

What makes some organizations sustainable and others likely unsustainable? The many participants in this study hoped for an easy answer to that question, and perhaps a “silver bullet” that could then be distributed to all organizations in need. We did not find any easy, single solutions, but we did find many characteristics that sustainable organizations have in common. What we found is that sustainable history organizations are often positioned well by circumstances, and they then engage in best practices of the field and make strategic decisions that ensure their sustainability. Sustainable organizations are also key members of their community, and often visionary as they search for new approaches to preserving and sharing the significant history under their responsibility.

“Positioned well by circumstances” refers in part to those organizations that are funded by a substantial endowment, or are part of a larger organization that helps to sustain it. These types of

² Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed October 6, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sustainable>

organizations may or may not be great museums or historical societies, but they are at least sustainable because of their ample resources.

More importantly, “positioned well by circumstances” refers to those historic sites, house museums and museums located in historic buildings that are fortunate enough to occupy places possessing historical integrity. These are authentic places of historical importance significant because of something important that occurred there, or because someone of historical importance lived or worked there. The authentic place or structure has survived to the present and still retains enough original historical integrity to be recognizable. This kind of historic place almost literally breathes historical authenticity that lends itself to interpretation that can be explained in broader historical context. These kinds of places give the organization in charge of it an advantage in the quest for sustainability.

Conversely, those organizations that are devoid of historical significance of place often struggle. At the very least, their burden to establish significance that attracts visitors and resources is greater. History is hard to sell to the general public anyway, and trying to run an organization that does not inherently connect to historical significance is even tougher.

Texas is blessed with numerous examples of integrity of place. Historic sites like the Alamo, although greatly changed since 1836, still evoke a sense of awe. Many history museums and historical societies occupy spaces in historic court houses, town halls, and jails. These places have immediate historical authenticity that visitors quickly grasp. It takes more to be sustainable than historical authenticity of place, but having that authenticity is a good beginning.

Historical museums located in modern facilities (more common in larger communities) can, of course, be very successful, but they have a tougher time establishing historical credibility. In these types of organizations, developing a narrative of historical importance connected to

broader national trends is vital. Larger museums that fail to do so may be sustainable, but they are likely to lag behind competing museums in their communities in attracting visitors and resources.

Beyond the concept of historical integrity, there are a number of other characteristics that sustainable organizations seem to have in common. The following list identifies these steps.

1. Strong Leadership with Successful Transitions

Successful organizations, especially in their founding years, benefit from strong leaders. An effective leader can face organizational difficulty by proper planning and exhausting all resources. Yet, strong leadership dwindles if the organization has not effectively planned for the next generation. Strong leadership can make an organization sustainable in the short term, but does not guarantee sustainability in the long term.

Sustainable organizations have governance leadership that transitioned from the founding generation to the third generation at minimum. The emphasis is on the third generation because most groups can transition from the founding generation to a second generation. A vulnerable time for the second generation occurs when they attempt to transfer the vision and energy of a founding board to the next generation. An organization two generations removed from its founding has achieved its initial goals, spent all initial funds, and must now redefine its purpose and raise new capital. One of the signs of success for an organization is when its first generation of leaders makes provisions for a succession of leadership.

2. Governance According to Best Practices

Sustainable museums operate within generally accepted best practices and from a set of adopted core documents. Examples include mission statements, a code of ethics, strategic plans,

and collections management. An organization that has adopted these four documents illustrates member like-mindedness in regards to the purpose of their organization. It also shows familiarity with and support of best practices with trustee governance, and observes best practices of the field with historical collections. Successful organizations have effective boards that understand their roles and carry them out. Unsuccessful organizations have boards that fail to understand their proper role, that interfere with management, do not raise adequate resources for the organization, and do not observe terms limits.

Another challenging issue is the transient nature of boards. Observers agree that many boards need training in what their proper roles are, in strategic planning, marketing, and fundraising. Even a well-trained board rotates out of office in a few years, necessitating a new round of board training. To address this issue, some foundations and organizations such as the Center for Nonprofit Management in Dallas offer training programs. However, distance may be an issue where needs are most urgent—such as in the small communities spread throughout Texas.

The Texas Historical Commission is one state agency that addresses governance issues. Yet, in order to be more effective in reaching communities in need, it requires a substantial increase in resources and personnel. The Texas Historical Commission needs additional funding to reinstate the Museum Assistance Program. This is a valuable program that in previous years provided hands-on assistance to small organizations throughout the state.

The Summerlee Commission recommends that organizations consult best practices as articulated by the American Alliance of Museums and the American Association for State and Local History. Within the state, the Texas Association of Museums and the Texas Historical Commission can provide help.

3. Engages in Strategic Planning

Organizations need to be especially purposeful about their activities. They need to constantly evaluate and assess their actions. Boards need to engage in strategic planning. This strategic planning should assess the organization's potential, its resources, and the context of its community. Planning need not result in a thick master plan that sits on a shelf. The process of planning needs to be so common that people no longer consider it a process. Planning should always start with a realistic review and assessment of the organization's mission. An outdated mission statement or a mission statement in dispute is often the root cause of many organizational problems.

4. Operates From a Business Plan and Is a Good Steward of Its Resources

Successful organizations operate from a business plan. The business plan must have realistic strategies for generating revenue and tracking expenses. Unrealistic budgets contain large categories in their income such as "new grant revenue" or "10% increase in membership revenue." A realistic budgets deal with financial data that is obtainable and feasible to maintain.

A sustainable organization is one where both the board and staff agree on the business plan and work together to execute it. The museum prepares while the board reviews regular financial reports. The organization also performs an annual independent audit. If public funds are part of the organization's budget, board and staff take great care to ensure the community has complete confidence in the organization's stewardship of its resources.

5. Funds Come From a Variety of Sources, Including Some Government Support

Dependable support from a city, county, or state government is a hallmark of sustainable museums. History museums need the support of city or county general revenue funds, hotel

occupancy taxes, or property taxes. Not only does this support provide a continual base level of funding for the museum, it provides confidence in other donors that the museum is permanent.

Non-profits do best when their funds come from a variety of sources. Dependence on one main source of income, whether an annual fund raising event or an outdoor festival, is risky. A healthy organization has government support, attendance revenue, membership revenue, annual fund revenue, proceeds from special events and festivals, local business support, grant funds from local foundations, and revenue from endowment funds.

Government responsibility for supporting culture and the arts is shrinking. This makes it difficult to insist that history organizations need government support, but that support is vital. Many history organizations begin with significant city or county support. Even if support eventually declines, it is still extremely important. Successful and sustainable history organization cannot exist without tax support of their operations. A history organization that expects to survive solely on admissions income, events, rentals, and donations will fail. The museum and history field need to continue strong advocacy at the state, county and city level. They must insist that tax support is necessary for sustainable history organizations. It is essential that those engaged in planning are aware of this need for available tax support.

The sustainable organization actively pursues planned giving, and uses planned gifts to build and enhance an endowment. Many history organizations have little or no endowment funds, and lack a strategy for building them. Even fewer have active planned giving programs, which are simple to begin and implement. History organizations are about heritage and legacies, and they should utilize these concepts to their advantage.

6. Thoroughly Engaged With Their Community

A sustainable museum engages with its community and this is evident in broad community financial, in-kind, and volunteer support. A sustainable organization provides a plethora of educational services to its community in the form of exhibits, programs, and events. This builds community loyalty.

A sustainable museum can answer these questions in the affirmative:

- a. Does the organization show evidence of being a vital member of its community?
- b. Do board and staff members participate in other organizations?
- c. Is community support obvious through financial contributions and contributions of goods and services?
- d. Is the work of the organization designed to meet the needs of current visitors and local audiences, including new immigrants?
- e. Does the local school system support the museum by sending students on field trips?
- f. Does the organization participate in History Day?

7. Collaborates With Everyone

A sustainable organization works with the entire community. They collaborate with local schools on field trips, cooperate with the local library on research projects or lecture series, join forces with the SPCA for a festival or event, enlist music organizations to hold performances at their venues, and more. A successful history organization is at the center of community activities, is a leader in the community, and a vital part of its history. An organization that does this will not be allowed to fail.

8. Is a Member of the Digital Age

It is necessary for organizations to have effective, orderly, educational websites. A website has moved beyond being a digital brochure. It is the most important gateway to an organization and has incredible marketing and fund raising potential. This area has changed so quickly in the past decade; therefore, it is one that should be reviewed. The Summerlee Commission recommends that boards and staffs recruit digitally skilled members who are comfortable with social media, crowd sourcing, and other new ways of presenting organizations. Organizations should take advantage of training opportunities wherever available---at community colleges, museum and non-profit training seminars, and online opportunities.

9. Is Careful With Over-Expanding Physical Resources

Balancing capacity with collection size can be a challenge. The hazards of over-expansion illustrate the need to have adequate planning and policies in place to help make decisions. Every new acquisition spreads precious resources. For those maintaining historical properties, the sole issue of deferred maintenance can sink an organization into financial ruin. Organizations can increase their chances for long-term survival if they were smaller and more focused, instead of growing or expanding.

10. Is Cautious When Beginning New Organizations

There is a tendency in the history world for groups to establish new organizations without sufficient planning for long-term viability. Groups contemplating such a formation should consult the checklist in this report to engage in deliberate and realistic planning. Is this new organization necessary? What role will it fill in the community that is not or cannot be met by an existing organization? How will the new organization govern and support finances in the long term?

Examples of Organizations Strongly Engaged With Their Communities

Community Engagement is a buzzword in museum circles in recent years. Museums benefit from becoming indispensable members of their local communities. History organizations need to do a better job of engaging their community. Below are some great examples of well-integrated history museums.

- **Brucemore**, a National Trust for Historic Preservation Property, is an example of a successful historic site in terms of its community involvement.

<http://www.preservationnation.org/travel-and-sites/sites/brucemore.html#.VYsTnrso6Uk>

- **Lower East Side Tenement Museum**, New York, New York. This museum tells the stories of 97 Orchard Street. Built on Manhattan's Lower East Side in 1863, this tenement apartment building was home to nearly 7000 working class immigrants. "They faced challenges we understand today: making a new life, working for a better future, starting a family with limited means."³ The museum has achieved wide recognition, enormous visitation, and substantial financial support by making smart choices and creating connections to their community.

<http://www.tenement.org/about.html>

Innovative Business Planning

With the sheer numbers of history organizations outstripping the ability of their communities to support them, the sustainable organization should consider some new ways of doing business.

³ "About the Tenement Museum," *Tenement Museum*, accessed September 3, 2015, <http://www.tenement.org/about.html>

A. New Business Models

Many cities and counties that own historic properties struggle with what to do with them. For many years, the assumption was to turn historic properties into museums, but innovative organizations are now looking at these historic properties in a new light for alternative potential. The goal of these groups is to preserve without that preservation becoming burdensome. Historical organizations with visionary leadership can play a key role in helping to revitalize their communities while still maintaining history.

There are several good examples of this revitalization. In 1973, the **Galveston Historical Foundation** established the Strand Revolving Fund. This pioneered the use of historic easements on acquired property. They then sold the property for redevelopment. This program and other GHF activities gradually transformed the Strand into the vibrant preservation and tourism magnet that it is today.

In Navasota, Texas, city leaders deliberated what to do with the **Robert Augustus Horlock House**. The city-owned historic house museum struggled for attendance, funding, and even purpose. In 2014, the Arts Council of the Brazos Valley collaborated with the City of Navasota to create the Navasota Artists in Residence program. This better utilized the historic home. The program encourages tourism, ensures preservation of the historic structure, creates a meeting and event venue for the community, and helps to grow the local arts community. For more information: <http://acbv.org/programs/artist-in-residence/>

B. History In Combination With Other Disciplines

Stand-alone history organizations are not usually sustainable unless they benefit from a number of unusual circumstances. One way to preserve collections of important history

materials is to fold them in to other non-history organizations such as science, children's or art museums, or libraries. While some history purists might feel that history takes a back seat to the dominant collections in these types of settings, they at least provide a stable and sustainable environment for the collections. A good example of this in Texas is the **Fort Worth Museum of Science and History**, **The Grace Museum** in Abilene, and San Antonio's **Witte Museum**.

The Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, in Fort Collins, Colorado, provides a wonderful example of history folded in to a children's science museum. Fort Collins is also a museum that has extraordinary integration into its local community. This new museum is the result of a full merger of a small, private local history museum with a city-owned and operated Children's and Science Center. It is particularly interesting because, rather than have separate galleries for history, science, and children's exhibits, they thoroughly integrated all disciplines within their exhibits. Hands-on and immersive activities common to children's and science museums enhance any science or history interests. The museum collaborated fully with the Fort Collins community on its exhibit planning and programs, which serve a very broad audience. For more information, go to this website: <http://www.fcmod.org/>

C. Sustaining History By Mergers

Concern over the large numbers of history museums, historic house museums, and historical societies has led to suggestions that more groups consider combining forces, by either formally merging or by entering into strategic collaborations. A number of

museums and high profile library and archive operations have combined forces in recent years.

- The Museum of the Confederacy and the American Civil War Center in Richmond, Virginia, formally merged in 2013 to form the new **American Civil War Museum**.
<https://acwm.org/>
- Cincinnati's museums have gone through a series of mergers over the past thirty years, with the **Cincinnati Museum Center** most recently combining forces with the American Museum of the Underground Railroad.
<https://www.cincymuseum.org/>
- Very recently, the **Rosenbach Library and Museum** has merged with the **Philadelphia Library System**.
<http://www.rosenbach.org/learn/news/rosenbach-museum-library-completes-affiliation-free-library-philadelphia-foundation>

Mergers are difficult and complex to assemble. Organizations will do well to explore strategic collaborations that stop short of full mergers. There are many good materials available to consult. An article by Martha Morris, "A More Perfect Union," is especially succinct and helpful. In her article she notes "mergers can take different forms. Sometimes, several separate organizations dissolve to form a new legal entity. Other times, an existing nonprofit can acquire one or more others as wholly owned subsidiaries. These mergers usually include staff, facilities and/or collections. When the Baltimore City Life Museum closed in the 1990s, for example, their collections were transferred to

the Maryland Historical Society. Similarly, the Phoenix Museum of History collections were subsumed by the Arizona Science Center in 2009.”⁴

Mergers are complex and emotional, and can take years to complete. There are considerable difficulties in merging board and staff cultures as well as fund raising events and community engagement activities. As Morris notes: “Mergers are not always the answer.”⁵ A less complex approach is to create an alliance or collaboration among organizations to share services. In one successful example, the **Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga** has been providing administrative services to the nearby **Hunter Museum of American Art and Creative Discovery Museum** since 2001. The relationship extends to joint fundraising and marketing. Museums can also cooperate by collaborating on specific projects such as cross marketing, sharing collections, touring exhibitions, or joint programming.

The primary motivation of the group is to cultivate sustainability, whether it be through a merger, alliance or collaboration. Occasionally the opposite occurs, and mergers between two organizations happen when an executive director leaves, or when one of the organizations hits a financial low spot. A merger under these conditions threatens to combine two small and weak institutions into one large weak institution.

D. Sustaining History Through Strategic Collaborations Instead of Mergers

Due to the complexity of mergers, many organizations instead are exploring strategic collaborations to share resources and ensure sustainability.

- **East Valley Museum Coalition, Phoenix, Arizona** is a coalition, set up in 2014, that exists between the Mesa Historical Museum, the Chandler Historical, and the Gilbert

⁴ Martha Morris, “A More Perfect Union,” *Museum*, July-August 2012

⁵ Ibid.

Historical Museum. In the wake of the closing of the Arizona History Museum in Phoenix, these three museums realized the similarities between their missions and collections and were able to collaborate strategically. Although not an official merger, the three have worked together on exhibits, collection displays, and educational programs.

- **Balboa Park Cultural Partnership, San Diego, California** is an umbrella group of more than two dozen cultural organizations that share a Balboa Park location. They collaborate on education programs and symposiums, among other activities.
<http://bpcp.org/>
- **Houston History Partnership, Houston, Texas** is a group best known for creating an online education resource and holds an annual history conference.
<http://www.houstonhistoryassociation.org/>
- **Legacies Dallas History Conference, Dallas, Texas** is a collaboration of many of the history organizations in the Dallas area. Their major focus is an annual conference, which just completed its 17th year, and a history journal, *Legacies*, published twice a year.
- **Historic Germantown, Pennsylvania** is a partnership of sixteen Philadelphia houses, destinations and museums, “Historic Germantown tells the stories of American Liberty and the everyday people who fought for it, reflecting a neighborhood of independence-seekers, community-builders, and American Dreamers.”⁶ Their vision statement: “Historic Germantown will be a leader in enhancing the economic and cultural development of our community through the

⁶ “About Us,” *Historic Germantown*, accessed September 3, 2015, <http://www.freedomsbackyard.com/about/>

collective voice of its member sites.”⁷ This organization formed to conserve numerous historic sites located in one economically challenged area.

<http://www.freedomsbackyard.com/>

⁷ Ibid.

History As A Third World Country: Why History is Difficult to Sustain

Historian David Lowenthal famously wrote, “The Past is a Foreign Country.”⁸ We propose that the past, specifically the field of history, is like a third world country. History stands apart from the rest of the cultural world, works with less public interest, has fewer resources than other disciplines, and includes special circumstances that create challenges for history organization leaders. All cultural non-profit organizations face unique quandaries to survive the competitive business climate. History organizations encounter these, but also face an additional set of challenges specific to organizations that work in the realm of preserving and interpreting history.

Although the economy has since largely recovered, the recent recession hit history organizations especially hard and many continue to struggle. Some weakened permanently, now operating at reduced levels with the prospects for long-term sustainability in question. Others achieved relative stability and discovered how to operate in this “new normal” environment of reduced resources. The resilience of history organization leadership is extraordinary, but relative to other non-profits and cultural organizations, the history field is lingering in a state of malaise.

Oxford Dictionaries defines malaise as a “general feeling of discomfort, illness, or uneasiness whose exact cause is difficult to identify.”⁹ This feeling persistently subsists among those in the history field, regardless of their depth of dedication. This essay addresses the reasons behind the malaise and offers practical advice to organizations that are struggling. Later sections

⁸ David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁹ Oxford University Press Dictionary, Accessed September 2, 2015.

http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/malaise

of this manual examine the characteristics common to struggling history organizations, financially and structurally sound establishments, and explore new ways of doing business.

Large Numbers of History Organizations but History Has a Limited Audience

History organizations far outnumber any other type of cultural organization. According to the Texas Historical Commission, there are more than 900 history organizations in Texas alone.¹⁰ In 2014, the Institute for Museum and Library Services concluded that there were over 35,000 museums in the country, with more than half of those classified as history museums.¹¹

On the surface, this would seem to indicate popularity. Opinion polls generally reflect people value heritage and heritage sites. Many cite heritage tourism as evidence of the public's inherent interest in history. Most Texans are very proud of Texas heritage. Interests include the Alamo, San Jacinto, and the History Channel as substantiation. Many people are interested in their own family heritage as well. People like knowing that their community heritage is preserved. However, this does not translate into active interest or support of Texas history museums or other history organizations. Accessibility to heritage is not compelling enough. Nor does it communicate the ongoing attention or care taking required to maintain these establishments.

The sheer volume of history museums, historic house museums, and historical societies splinters potential audiences, confuses the public and funders, and pits organizations against each other to compete for board members, volunteers, community support, school field trips, and funding. The quantity of organizations is an issue that other disciplines do not have to deal with. Rural counties containing one art museum, without a children's museum or science museum,

¹⁰ "Fast Facts," *Texas Historical Commission*, last modified January 12, 2015.
<http://www.thc.state.tx.us/about/fast-facts>

¹¹ Justin Grimes, C. Arturo Manjarrez, Kim A. Miller, and Deanne W. Swan, "Museum Universe Data File," *Institute of Museum and Library Services*, December 2014,
http://www.imls.gov/research/museum_universe_data_file.aspx

might possess a dozen or more history organizations. These organizations have distinct missions, collections, and historic properties to maintain. They feel justified maintaining separate organizations. However, the low level of attendance and financial support attests to the difficulties so many organizations face.

Anecdotal conversations, professional conference presentations, and articles in professional journals all agree that attendance for history museums, especially historic house museums, is down. Attendance has been down for years at the large historic villages like Colonial Williamsburg. Small museums around the country suffer as well. Attendance for most history museums peaked in 1976 and has been steadily declining since.¹² Recent studies of the arts have also noted similar trends among art museums, ballets, operas, and symphonies, indicating long-term demographic shifts of civic pastimes are underway.¹³ Again, history continues to lag significantly behind these other areas in attendance and funding.

Important Collections Supported By Too Few Resources

History leaders voice concerns that too many small historical organizations care for too many important materials while competing for too little support. This concern was great enough in the 1980s that the Summerlee Foundation chartered the first Summerlee Commission in 1989-90 to assess the state of history collections, organizations, and the teaching of Texas history in schools. This study confirmed that rural historical organizations hold the largest number of historical collections. These are the very organizations that have the fewest resources to care for them.¹⁴

History organizations in larger communities have fared better. Many obtained

¹² Carson, Cary. "The End of History Museums: What's Plan B?" *Public Historian*, (November 2008)

¹³ National Endowment for the Arts Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, NEA Research Report #57, September 2013.

¹⁴ The Report of the Summerlee Commission on Texas History, LaPorte, Texas, Summerlee Foundation, 1992.

accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums. These museums have access to resources that are unavailable in smaller communities. In the twenty-five years since the first Summerlee Commission, small organizations have made important headway in the care of their collections. General awareness of professional standards for caring for collections is significantly higher than in 1990. However, resources needed to provide adequate physical storage and hire professional staff is still lagging. Smaller communities may lack prominent corporations, wealthy individuals or foundations that often support such organizations in larger communities. These are vital resources for history museums. Yet, in rural areas, these resources are limited and generally take a back seat to other community needs. As the urbanization of America continues, multitudes of museums remain in rural areas where they often face a lack of needed resources.

History and the Broken Model of the Public-Private Partnership

The model of public-private shared responsibility for the restoration and/or relocation of historical properties helped to establish many history organizations in the past 60 years. These arrangements generally provide tax support for public financial assistance and couple private management of the property with a public museum. Although these partnerships worked well for many years, they are now failing as cash-strapped local governments gradually curtail and sometimes abandon their agreements. This has created a cycle of poverty resembling this scenario: a historical property is saved, restored, and enthusiastically opened to the public, but with little thought for long-term care and financing. The initial thrill of the grand opening soon fades, and the reality of day-to-day operations and repair cycles sets in. Public funding gradually declines. Private funding to fill the gap is hard to find. “Annual maintenance” gradually turns

into “deferred maintenance.” This eventually accumulates into astronomical repair bills that are beyond the capability of fundraising. This result is evident with many historical properties.¹⁵

The decline of public funding exposes the underlying flaw in the business model of history organizations that base their operations in historic structures: most of the emphasis focuses on securing the building, restoring it, and opening it “for tours.” The public believes that most museums pay for operations with admissions income, which is not true. Only in rare cases can a history museum be famous enough to draw several hundred thousand visitors a year, therefore allowing it to fund its operations from admissions. An example of this exception is the Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas, Texas. The Alamo has traditionally funded its operations through gift shop sales, as it does not charge an admission fee. The Bob Bullock State History Museum has a business model that largely funds its operations through IMAX theater ticket sales and facility rentals in addition to admissions. An ordinary, local history museum will not be able to survive on admission income and occasional wedding rentals. Too many museums are set up with a business model of “build it and they will come.” This assumption generally does not work.

Over-Expansion—A Tendency for Many History Museums

History organizations created with flawed business models often compound their troubles by taking on too much. With little attention paid to long-term maintenance needs, many over-expand due to the inability to resist the temptation to save another building. Even a “free” building soon becomes a huge obligation for any organization. Many organizations also acquire too many buildings, blinded by the relative ease of procuring acquisition and restoration funds. Just as large history

¹⁵ Gary N. Smith, “House Museum Partnerships with Local Governments: A Broken Model?” *History News*, Spring 2011.

organizations have seen that new visitor centers and expanded galleries do not necessarily increase attendance, smaller organizations generally do not improve attendance with collection or property additions. Over-expansion not only includes the over-acquisition of property and buildings, but also includes accepting too many collections and archives. These often require additional staff and may not be supportable long term.

The Generational Effect and Losing the Cause

The special circumstances of history organizations come into sharper focus when examined through the lens of institutional life cycles. Many history organizations were founded by a group motivated to preserve a building or site, other times by an individual with a collection of historical materials or a house. Beyond the impulse to commemorate, this urge to preserve occurs in response to the threat of losing communal heritage. Museums established for these reasons benefit from the passion and hard work of their founding members. This drive works well to raise the initial money needed to establish the museum, save the building, and occasionally secure commitments for local government funding. The cause fuels the energy and initially there is real initiative and motivation.

Eventually, they must transition to the next generation of leaders. With the building or collection now saved and the museum open, the board, volunteers and/or staff then shift emphasis to cataloging the collections, installing changing exhibits, hosting school field trips, and raising annual funds. The mundane tasks involved with running a museum is now the cause. Yet, in truth, that cause is a necessity and fulfilling that necessity rarely generates the passion associated with founding a museum.

As the museum's first generation of enthusiastic leaders begins to fade away, the museum enters an extremely challenging period. A successful museum will now recruit the next generation of leaders and hire professional staff. This new generation of leaders may do well for a period of years, but subsequent generations of board members and volunteers will struggle. These leaders are now two generations removed from the original fervor that propelled the museum into existence. The perceived relevance of the museum to the community is no longer strong.

Now the struggling organization enters the last stage of its life cycle. Museums that have served their purpose of preserving the history of their community but have not successfully transitioned leadership, built a contemporary constituency, or are supported financially by the current community may be candidates for closing.

The entire non-profit world has gone through an extraordinarily difficult time, but history organizations have a special set of obstacles to confront. History organizations are too numerous, and too clustered in rural areas that lack resources to support them. Often founded with little understanding of the difficulties inherent in preserving and operating historic properties on a business-like basis, they fight losing battles to keep their properties from further deterioration and struggle to locate the next generation of leaders. Despite these difficulties, history lovers in local communities continue to plunge headlong into new preservation projects. With so many organizations struggling for funding and attendance, it is fundamentally important that community leaders be aware of these special circumstances to ensure future problems are mitigated or avoided.

Characteristics of Unsustainable Organizations

Carol Kammen's 2009 article, *An Abundance of History*, summed up the issue well: there are many thousands of history museums across the country.¹⁶ Many are in precarious position for a variety of reasons: lack of funding, lack of new leadership to replace aging board members, the overwhelming burden of caring for deteriorating physical structures, etc. These difficulties, taken together, can spell trouble for an organization's long-term sustainability.

In general, unattached or stand-alone history museums, are most vulnerable. By unattached or stand alone, we mean history museums or historic houses organized as separate 501 © 3 organizations and not part of a larger organization, or affiliated with a larger museum or university. Many historic house museums, whether in small towns or large cities, are stand-alone history museums. Because their history is mostly local, these museums usually do not entice enough tourist traffic or local support to fund their own operations without significant support or affiliation with larger organizations.

History organizations that expect to fund themselves without the benefit of funding assistance from city or county budgets, Hotel Occupancy Tax funds, or contributed utilities are extremely vulnerable. Few museums are able to fund their operations entirely from earned income and private philanthropy. Income from admissions and event rentals, typically the heart of a small museum's calculated stream of income, makes up only a minor part of a museum's budget. This is also true for many larger operations.

¹⁶ Carol Kammen, "An Abundance of History," *History News* 64, no. 3 (2009): 3-4.

Local museums typically only attract local audiences. Historic houses affiliated with famous inhabitants will only be able to draw a certain number of out of town tourists. A historic house belonging to an early local pioneer family will not.

A larger issue is that most local history museums display their collections with little connection to larger state and national historical themes. Strictly local history may not be compelling enough to guarantee survival. If the museum is not fortunate enough to have state or national significance, then it must make an effort to place its history in a larger context.

Museums dominated by a founder or founding board that does not cultivate the next generation of leaders will find it hard to sustain a board of trustees in the future. Founding board members often have an overriding sense of mission and purpose, frequently related to saving a historic building or opening a new museum in an old courthouse. They have all-consuming dedication and zeal, are willing to work night and day towards their goal, and will often serve as a museum's main governance and leadership for years, if not decades. Yet, what happens when they are unable to continue their work, or if they did not make a conscious effort to recruit the next generation of leadership? This is a vulnerable time in the life of a museum and many falter.

Museums that are isolated from their local community and community leaders will not have support when they need it. Successful museums are well integrated into community life. History museums and historical societies that do not involve the community are perceived by others as opaque, and make little impact on the community's cultural life. More attempts to include the community in their leadership, to hold programs and events of interest, and to integrate themselves into the life of their community create successful lifelines for future sustainability.

Museums that memorialize their founding generation of ancestors and have stagnant collections or exhibits with programs that are out of touch with changing population demographics will struggle for visitors and funding. A common characteristic of history museums is that collections and exhibits commemorate the founding of the community, its local agriculture and business, and its business and civic leaders. Public programs and events usually mirror these themes. As communities across the country diversify both culturally and ethnically, museums must develop an appeal to their present community. Otherwise, their collections and programs will be increasingly out of step with the modern public. In Texas, even small communities are seeing demographic changes such as a significant addition of Spanish speaking citizens. Are local museums making every effort to reflect these new communities?

Museums that over-expand, over acquire, and otherwise grow beyond what they can manage will find it difficult to sustain their operations. This is a common problem related to the “founding board member” issue. A fired-up first generation, flushed with success in saving buildings and adding new exhibit wings, but not yet faced with the inevitable repair and maintenance issues that will come, will often over build. Many museums that over-expand their physical plants in their formative years leave an impossible burden for the next generation of museum leaders.

Finally, museums founded for the “wrong reasons” will struggle for purpose and community support. These include museums founded by convention and visitor bureaus hoping for an economic catalyst. Museum founded for these reasons lack a real cause to motivate and unite volunteers, often creating an unreasonable burden of expectations for financial success. Very few history museums can live up to this expectation. Museum s established with funding

from a local city or county government with unrealistic hopes of instant tourism will quickly find growing frustration from government officials, cutbacks, or even the discontinuation of funding.

Communities that are already struggling to support several history organizations might assess their organizations with the above perils in mind. Those contemplating opening a new historic house museum or other history organization should keep these in mind and assess their own chances for success.

Before You Open It: A Checklist for Planning New Museums in Historic Buildings

At this very moment, there are history enthusiasts considering founding a new history museum in a historic building or historic house museum. Before your group takes the momentous step of setting up a history organization responsible for maintaining important structures and artifacts in trust for the public, please consider the following questions:

Write a short paragraph about why you are opening a new museum. What will it contribute to the community? Can another existing group perform the functions of this museum? Who is the main audience for the museum? Who would make up secondary audiences?

Next, consider these important issues:

A. Mission/Purpose/Importance

1. What is the purpose/mission of the museum? In other words, what are you going to do, and who for, or with?
2. Does the community want this new museum? How has the community indicated its desire for it and demonstrated its intent to support it?
3. Is the property historically important? Did anything famous/notorious occur there? Did anyone famous live there?
4. Does the building and site substantially retain its historical integrity?

5. Is there any historical importance that would be a draw to anyone outside of the immediate community?
6. What important history can be taught at your site that is not being taught elsewhere already or could not be taught anywhere else?
7. Does the property qualify for any designations like the National Register of Historic Places or the Registered Texas Historic Landmark designation? Are there any local designations?

For assistance with determining historical importance, consult the National Register of Historic Places listing of categories: <http://www.achp.gov/nrcriteria.html>

B. Property and Condition

1. What is the property? (House, commercial building, farm building, etc.)
2. What is its primary construction? (Brick, wood frame, etc.)
3. Where is the property located? What context is it in (residential, rural, commercial, etc.)?
4. Has it recently been occupied?
5. What was its most recent use?
6. What condition is it in?
7. Are changes in the property so extensive that most of the historic integrity is gone?
Are any such changes permanent or reversible?
8. Does it have working electricity, air conditioning/heating, and plumbing?
9. Does the roof leak?

10. Does it show evidence of shifting/settling of the foundation?
11. How much land is included? How much has the landscape changed from what it was during the period of significance? Is restoration of the landscape to the period of significance possible?
12. What about accessibility and parking?

C. Furnishings, Collections, Archives

1. Does the property include relevant furnishings—furnishings that belonged to the principal occupant?
2. Are the furnishings important? Are they related to the mission/purpose of the museum and the importance of the house?
3. Are there furnishings that are not in the structure---stored elsewhere?
4. What condition are the furnishings in?
5. Are there other important materials such as photographs, documents, and books?
6. Where would collections be stored if not needed for an exhibit? If off-site, what would be the cost?

D. Operations and Finances as a Museum

1. What do you envision will happen at this museum?
2. What days/hours do you contemplate the museum being open?
3. What is the main source of income for the museum?
 - a. If the city/county, is there capital funding to establish the museum and
 - b. Will there be operations funds provided by the city/county on an annual basis to run the museum?
 - c. Who would pay for the utilities?

4. What other sources of income are there?
5. Is there any endowment included with the property?
6. Is there a business plan for the museum and have a capital and operations budget been prepared?
7. What are the costs of locating a museum here? What are the property taxes, if any?
What about insurance for the house and collections?
8. What other costs should be considered?
9. Who will actually work at the museum and operate it?
10. Are there readily available volunteers?

E. Governance

1. Who will govern the museum? Private board, public governmental agency or department, etc.?
2. Has the non-profit organization registered with the State of Texas and the Internal Revenue Service?
3. If private, how many people will serve and what experience do they bring with them?
4. If public, what department, and do they have other cultural facilities in their domain?
5. If public/private partnership, what provisions will be made in writing to secure continued city support over what period of years?

F. Alternatives

1. After answering all of the above questions, look again at your answer to this question:

why are you starting a new museum? Do you believe that what you are doing is not

and cannot be done by any other group or organization?
2. Finally, consider the possible alternatives to starting a new museum available through

the Texas Historical Commission. There are other ways to preserve and interpret

history:

<http://www.thc.state.tx.us/public/upload/publications/Alternatives%20to%20Starting%20a%20Museum%20Medallion%20Article%202013.pdf>

If it is Time to Close It: Considerations for Dissolving an Organization

When is it time to close?

An organization should consider closing at the point where the reasons for staying open no longer outnumber the reasons for closing. Generally, places consider closing when:

- They can no longer attract people willing to serve on the board
- The financial liabilities of operating are consistently larger than the museum's abilities to raise funds.
- The organization is in long-term debt, with no reasonable way to get out of it.
- Community support, as measured in attendance, volunteers, and financial support has dwindled to insignificant levels
- The organization determines that its mission is unnecessary and/or the organization is no longer able to accomplish it.

The last point of determining a mission unnecessary deserves further discussion. In the business world, it is typical for companies to thrive for a number of years and then to close their doors for lack of business. This lack of business might be from bad business practices, but it could also be because of the changing needs and desires of the customer base, a decline in the local economy or any number of factors not the fault of the business. In the business world, a company in this situation might restructure, merge with another business, or simply go out of business.

We find this same concept hard to accept in the non-profit world. Once we establish a non-profit organization, we assume that it will operate in perpetuity. Perpetuity in non-profit businesses probably does not make any more sense than it does in the for-profit world. A history

organization that is founded, promotes and teaches history over a period of years, and helps educate a new generation of local citizens should be deemed a success whether it eventually closes its doors or not. It may simply have reached the end of its mission's usefulness to the community. In which case, closing is not something to be ashamed of.

How to Dissolve a Non-Profit Organization in Texas

Fortunately, there are abundant resources to guide organizations that reach the point of dissolution. Dissolving the organization is a straightforward process. The more challenging part comes with disposing of any historical collections. In reading the information, summarized below, three things stand out:

1. Contact the Secretary of State's Office in Texas, because they have jurisdiction over objects held in trust for the public (most museum artifacts are).
2. The organization should have the advice of an attorney
3. Trustees should not be under the illusion that the dissolution of the non-profit and the responsible disposition of history collections are quick or easy. The museum, historical society, or library has objects important to the community. Therefore, at the very least it has an ethical responsibility to make sure that the disposal occurs gracefully.

Resources

There are many resources available on the internet from groups like Nolo, the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), and there is even a *Dissolving a Non-Profit for Dummies* book.

- **Nolo** <http://www.nolo.com/about.html> outlines the process a step at a time.
NOLO advises: “Texas’s laws for nonprofits are contained within its more general Business Organizations Code and are unique and complex. You are strongly urged to consult with a lawyer to obtain additional information regarding the winding up and termination of a Texas nonprofit corporation.”¹⁷
- **The DFW Philanthropy Conference** has sample forms to be used to guide a non-profit through the board process of dissolution:
<http://www.dfwphilanthropyconference.com/dfw/assets/2012/handouts/2012-dfw-phil-conf-handout-ann-abbe-dissolution-documents.pdf>
- **Board Source** has a publication called **The Nonprofit Board Answer Book**. It has a chapter called “When Should a Nonprofit Organization Consider Closing up Shop? Practical Guide for Board Members and Chief Executives.” This is the Expanded Edition from 2002. Order it directly from Board Source.
- **The IRS** has information, including the Non-Profit Termination Form:
<http://www.irs.gov/Charities-&-Non-Profits/Termination-of-an-Exempt-Organization>
- **Texas Secretary of State’s Office**: http://www.sos.state.tx.us/corp/forms/652_boc.pdf
- **The National Trust for Historic Preservation** has published a Historic House Closedown Checklist: <http://blog.preservationnation.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/CloseDown-Checklist.pdf>

¹⁷ David. M. Steingold, “How to Dissolve a Nonprofit Corporation in Texas,” *Nolo.com*, accessed September 3, 2015, <http://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/how-dissolve-nonprofit-corporation-texas.html>

- **The National Trust’s *Best Practices for Preservation Organizations Involved in Easement and Land Stewardship*** discusses closing a historic house museum and recommends, “the preservation organization fulfill its mission by ensuring that the property is adequately protected before conveying it out of public ownership, usually through a historic preservation easement.”¹⁸
- A further discussion of the ethics involved with closing a museum is found in the **American Alliance of Museums** publication, “Museum: Ethical Considerations for Museum Closures”, by Amy Rogers Nazarov, *Museum*, July-August 2009; and “Death With Dignity.”
- The **American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)** Committee on Professional Standards and Ethics published an ethics position paper, “When A History Museum Closes”, in the Summer 2007 issue of *History News*.

What Happens to the Historical Collections?

The issue that haunts everyone in the history field is the ultimate disposition of historical collections. This is a very sensitive subject because of the importance of collections to their community and the fact that, in many cases, the donors of these materials are still alive.

As is often the case, a museum may not have a complete record of its collections, making it difficult to prove ownership, much less dispose of these items. The latest edition of “**A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections**,” by Marie C. Malaro and Ildiko Pogany DeAngelis has a chapter on “Objects Found in the Collections.” Among many other important points are these:

¹⁸ Tom Mayes, “Closing a House Museum: From Lemons to Lemonade,” *PreservationNation Blog*, September 23, 2011, <http://blog.preservationnation.org/2011/09/23/closing-a-house-museum-from-lemons-to-lemonade/#.VekjBBFVhBc>

- A museum can transfer custody of objects without transferring legal title. This may occur when it is determined that the likelihood of a claimant is remote and the burden of proof would be on the claimant.
- Low market value may suggest that there is not likely to be a claimant for an object.
- Many states have abandoned property laws that may help to establish ownership of undocumented object

The **AASLH** has a Technical Leaflet that details the legal and ethical responsibilities of history organizations that dissolve and dispose of collections assets:

http://download.aaslh.org/history+news/ethics_paper_no2.pdf

The issue of the responsible disposition of historical collections is important enough to have state level involvement. For a quick summary of what happened to the collections of several museums that closed in the past few years: <http://hyperallergic.com/84447/resting-in-pieces-the-scattered-fate-of-closed-museums/>

How big an issue is it? No one knows at this point. There are anecdotal accounts of museums that have gone out of business or simply shut their doors. What is happening to the collections, and what would responsible options be? This issue deserves further study.

References and Notes

“Welcome to the Summerlee Foundation.” Accessed August 26, 2015. www.summerlee.org.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Accessed October 6, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sustainable>

David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Oxford University Press Dictionary, Accessed September 2, 2015, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/malaise

“Fast Facts.” *Texas Historical Commission*. Last modified January 12, 2015. <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/about/fast-facts>

Justin C. Grimes, Arturo Manjarrez, Kim A. Miller, and Deanne W. Swan. “Museum Universe Data File.” *Institute of Museum and Library Services*. December 2014. http://www.ims.gov/research/museum_universe_data_file.aspx

Cary Carson, in an article in *The Public Historian* in 2007 wrote that, while “no national organization keeps statistics on museum attendance, “ “...without reliable, comparable numbers, the *perception* goes unchallenged that paid attendance at history museums has plunged in the last five years.” (Carson, Cary. “The End of History Museums: What’s Plan B?” *Public Historian*, (November 2008).

Writing in the Final Conference Report for the National Trust’s *Forum on Historic Site Stewardship in the 21st Century* in 2007, The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s James Vaughan added, “Over the past decade much has been written about declining attendance at our nation’s historic sites. At a time when the market for heritage tourism, cultural tourism, and eco-tourism is rapidly expanding, historic sites are drawing fewer and fewer visitors”. (Vaughan, James. “Introduction: The Call for A National Conversation,” *Forum Journal* (22:8), 5-9).

National Endowment for the Arts Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, NEA Research Report #57, September 2013.

The Report of the Summerlee Commission on Texas History, LaPorte, Texas, Summerlee Foundation, 1992.

Gary N. Smith, “House Museum Partnerships with Local Governments: A Broken Model?”, *History News*, Spring 2011.

Carol Kammen, “An Abundance of History.” *History News* 64, no. 3 (2009): 3-4.

“About the Tenement Museum,” *Tenement Museum*, accessed September 3, 2015,

<http://www.tenement.org/about.html>

Cheryl Donaldson, Co-Director, Fort Collins Discovery Museum, June 2015
Information based on visits by telephone and in-person at the museum by Gary Smith

Martha Morris, "A More Perfect Union," *Museum*, July-August 2012
Martha Morris is associate professor and assistant director of the museum studies program at George Washington University and co-author of *Planning Successful Museum Building Projects*, Alta Mira 2009

"About Us." *Historic Germantown*. accessed September 3, 2015.
<http://www.freedomsbackyard.com/about/>

David M. Steingold, "How to Dissolve a Nonprofit Corporation in Texas." *Nolo.com*. Accessed September 3, 2015.
<http://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/how-dissolve-nonprofit-corporation-texas.html>

Tom Mayes, "Closing a House Museum: From Lemons to Lemonade." *PreservationNation Blog*. September 23, 2011.
<http://blog.preservationnation.org/2011/09/23/closing-a-house-museum-from-lemons-to-lemonade/#.VekjBBFVhBc>

David E. Kyvig and Myron A. Marty, *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You*. (Nashville: AASLH, 1982).

Museums for a New Century: A Report of the Commission on Museums for a New Century, Washington: American Association of Museums, 1984.

Several publications in the past decade analyzed the struggle of small history museums to survive, and most cited similar factors: lack of money and lack of attendance. The first "Kykuit" Conference in 2002, described in Gerald George's *History News* article, "Historic House Museum Malaise: A Conference Considers What's Wrong," helped open a field-wide discussion of the special problems of house museums. (George, Gerald. "Historic House Museum Malaise: A Conference Considers What's Wrong," *History News*, Autumn 2002.)

Kenneth C. Turino and Carol B. Stapp published the article "Does America Need Another House Museum?" in *History News*, published by the American Association for State and Local History in 2004. In 2009, Turino wrote another article for *History News*, published by the American Association for State and Local History entitled, "America Doesn't Need Another House Museum" in 2009.

More recently, Ruth Graham questions in August 2014 whether we have too many historic house museums in an article in the *Boston Globe* entitled, "The Great Historic House Museum Debate."

Are You Sustainable: A Self-Directed Assessment Tool

What: This self-directed assessment tool provides opportunities for discussion and benchmarking for board, staff, and organization leaders.

Who Should Take It: This tool is a group exercise, with a group of staff and board addressing each question jointly. A discussion of each point, including agreement on a point score, will lead to productive discussions. It will also help those with less experience and/or knowledge of the organization to be on the same page as the organization's leaders. If a group exercise is not possible, an organization may have its leaders take this survey individually, to compare and discuss their notes at a later meeting. Either way, this is a tool to make general assessments of an organization's strengths and weaknesses.

How To Take It: Each question asks you to make a determination ranking of anywhere between 1 and 5. In all cases, a 1 will indicate "no" or "disagree strongly." A 5 will indicate "yes" and "agree strongly."

Interpreting Your Results: Calculate your points for each section and add your sum to discover your total. The final page of this document contain suggestions for how to interpret your results.

Public Trust and Accountability**(40 points possible)**

Our organization has identified primary and secondary audiences.	1 2 3 4 5
Our organization is a good member of the neighborhood.	1 2 3 4 5
Our organization is open / inclusive to participation by diverse audiences.	1 2 3 4 5
Our organization operates with transparency in all aspects of operations.	1 2 3 4 5
Other organizations invite our leaders, board and staff, to participate in their programs or serve in other capacities.	1 2 3 4 5
If our organization closed, the community would miss our presence.	1 2 3 4 5
Our organization actively collaborates with other organizations, including non-history organizations.	1 2 3 4 5
Our organization is known, visited by, and supported by local government leaders.	1 2 3 4 5

Your Point Total:**Leadership, Governance, and Human Capital****(60 points possible)**

Our organization's leadership is well aware of best practices of the field.	1 2 3 4 5
Our board has moved beyond the first generation of leaders.	1 2 3 4 5
Our organization has a relatively easy time in recruiting board members.	1 2 3 4 5
Our organization has board term limits and enforces them.	1 2 3 4 5
Our board members represent a mix of experienced and new members.	1 2 3 4 5
Our board's demographic makeup reflects that of our community	1 2 3 4 5
Our board members clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.	1 2 3 4 5
Our board and staff, especially the executive director, work well together.	1 2 3 4 5

Our organization has adopted a code of ethics and reviews it with every new board member. **1 2 3 4 5**

The work of our organization is well supported by volunteers. **1 2 3 4 5**

Key staff members (if any) are well qualified and well supported by the organization. **1 2 3 4 5**

Key staff members are encouraged and supported in participating in professional development opportunities. **1 2 3 4 5**

Your Point Total:

Mission, Planning, and Public Engagement (50 points possible)

The organization's mission is well known inside / outside the organization. **1 2 3 4 5**

The mission is easy to understand and inspiring. **1 2 3 4 5**

The organization has a vision statement that is inspiring. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization's leadership is unified in its understanding of the mission. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization regularly engages in planning beyond routine planning, i.e., strategic and long range planning. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization is well known in the community. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization actively promotes itself through traditional and social media. **1 2 3 4 5**

Staff members are adept at using modern media. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization makes good use of social media and the internet to reach a wide audience. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization's web site is up to date and easy for the public to use. **1 2 3 4 5**

Your Point Total:

Education, Exhibits, and Interpretation**(30 points possible)**

The collections, exhibits, and programs are not dominated by the pioneer era and agricultural history of our region. **1 2 3 4 5**

The history of our community, as taught in our organization, relate to state and national historical trends. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our exhibits and programs are well attended and supported by the local community. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization receives loans of material, financial support, and in-kind donations for exhibits and programs. **1 2 3 4 5**

The local school system plans student field trips to our organization. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization participates in a local history day. **1 2 3 4 5**

Your Point Total:**Collections Stewardship****(25 points possible)**

Our historical collections are cared for according to best practices of the field. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our historical collections represent the current demographics of the community. **1 2 3 4 5**

Community members regularly offer new materials to our organization. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our historical collections are easily located and accessible by staff and qualified researchers. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization uses computerized methods such as Past Perfect to care for and access its historical collections. **1 2 3 4 5**

Your Point Total:

Financial Stability**(50 points possible)**

Our organization is a responsible steward of the money it receives/spends. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization prepares regular financial statements that are reviewed by staff and board. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization generally has a balanced budget. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization has a sufficient endowment fund and/or reserve fund to withstand an emergency. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization has a planned giving program that adds money to the endowment. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization has an annual independent audit. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our board and staff work together to generate revenue for the organization. **1 2 3 4 5**

Board members make personal donations and actively solicit gifts for the organization **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization receives annual funds from the city, county, or state. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization receives steady financial and in-kind support from the public. **1 2 3 4 5**

Your Point Total:**Facilities Care****(15 points possible)**

Our organization is a good steward of its facilities. **1 2 3 4 5**

Our organization has resources to monitor and take care of routine maintenance issues. **1 2 3 4 5**

If major capital repairs are needed, we have one or more reliable sources for those funds. **1 2 3 4 5**

Your Point Total:**Point Total for All Sections:**

Evaluating Your Score

There are 270 possible points. A total score of 200 or more indicates that your organization is doing well and is likely sustainable. A score of at least 189 is a positive response in the 70% range, which is the minimum level indicating future sustainability. A score below 125 shows that your organization needs to have a serious discussion regarding its strengths and weaknesses, including how to address weaknesses.

Scores may vary by area, but you might regard a 70% level as being a good starting point.

Public Trust and Accountability	(40 points possible---70% =28)
Leadership and Governance	(60 points possible---70% = 42)
Mission, Planning, and Public Engagement	(50 points possible---70% = 35)
Education, Exhibits, and Interpretation	(30 points possible---70% =21)
Collections Stewardship	(25 points possible---70% = 18)
Financial Stability	(50 points possible—70% = 35)
Facilities Care	(15 points possible---70% = 11)

Summerlee Commission on the Sustainability of History Organizations 2014-2015

Gary Smith, Chair

Dallas Heritage Village

Gary_Smith1@baylor.edu

Ruth Ann Rugg

Texas Association of Museums

ruthann@texasmuseums.org

Bob Bluthardt

Fort Concho National Historic Landmark

robert.bluthardt@cosatx.us

Carolyn Spears

Stone Fort Museum

cspears@sfasu.edu

Houston McGaugh

Star of the Republic Museum

hmcgaugh@blinn.edu

Stephanie Turnham

Museum of Western Art

sturnham@mowatx.com

Jack McKinney

Dr Pepper Museum & Free Enterprise
Institute

jackmck@drpeppermuseum.com

Cliff Vanderpool

Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum

gcvanderpool@pphm.wtamu.edu