The 2017 Year End Report of the Executive Director

Move to Grimke Building

We close an eventful 2017 with great hope and expectation. We are ever closer to our avowed goal of moving the African American Civil War Museum (AACWM) into the main Grimke building and tripling the Museum’s space from the current 5,000 sq. feet to approximately 15,000 sq. feet. The new space will house the current exhibit that will be reinstalled and produce two new exhibits. The flagship exhibit will be called “From Slavery to the White House: The Civil War Legacy of First Lady Michelle Obama.” The second new exhibit will be “Bullets to Ballots: The Voting Rights Legacy of the USCT.” We are also developing a new exhibit about “Capt. Louis Emilio and the Hispanic Legacy of the USCT.”

Museum Buildout Update

In 2014 the African American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation and the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development entered into a Grant Agreement, that would provide funding to do the design, build and installation of the “Museum Tenant Build-Out” specified in the warm lit shell or base building provided by the developer of the Grimke Project. In 2014, the Roadside Development Company was selected as the developer for the Grimke Project. The Roadside Development Company withdrew from the project. Therefore, in early 2015 the second bidder, Community Three Partners was selected to fulfill the project.

In 2015, Mayor Bowser and Council chose to enhance the Grimke Project by adding a housing requirement that was not there when the project was sent out to public bid in 2014. Therefore, a new round of negotiations was required to guarantee that the AACWM would have enough funds to complete its portion of the project. It took some heavy lifting, but the Mayor and Council realized that the housing requirement had to be paid for in the Grimke Project and agreed to add $500,000 to the $2.8 million that was set aside for the Museum Buildout and is being held in a special account at Wells Fargo Bank.

The 2014 Grant Agreement with the city attached an Exhibit F that set forth a draw schedule spread over the period from 2014 to the end of 2018 when the project was to have been completed. The 2018 completion date has slipped to 2020 due to Roadside Development Company’s withdrawal and other issues. We are currently in the “Draw 3” portion of the Grant Agreement and well within the program and funding objectives as established by the Grant Agreement. “Draw 4” will take place in late 2018 or early 2019. In that phase, the $1.75 million capital construction phase will begin to pay for the Museum Tenant Buildout, fabrication, and relocation of Museum exhibits into the new space.
Overview of New AACWM

The program portion of the project is moving along fine. Stan Britt, the Museum’s base building architect from SultonCampbell Britt and Associates has developed drawings for our space reflecting various uses and exhibit locations and has held at least two meetings with Community Three Partners architect and engineers to move the project along. The Museum’s exhibit architect, Jeff Howard from Howard Revis has been working along with Stan Britt to relocate the current exhibits into the new space and make arrangements for the new exhibits and other programs being proposed for the new location. Curator, Faith Ruffin is working with Rachel Swarns and Audrea Barnes of the Obama family to build the exhibit “From Slavery to the White House,” and this project is in the collections phase and well on the way to completion. The team that will work on the “Bullets to Ballots” exhibit project has met once and should have the story line completed in the spring of 2018 and should start its collections phase in the fall and will be ready for installation in time for the 2020 opening.

Features of the New AACWM

There are three key new features of the new museum location at Grimke. The first feature will complete the Duke Plan of combining the Museum, subway stop, the monument and museum to form the African American Civil War Memorial Plaza, a historic destination with a large open space. The second feature is to demarcate the newly expanded Museum with a grand entrance, a large ceremonial porch with a sight line leading directly to the Memorial across the street with 209,145 names of the USCT. The plan further calls for the use of pavers, landscape, art and other design elements to visually and artistically connect the Museum at Grimke to the Memorial which is across historic Vermont Avenue. Thirdly, the Museum will feature at the northern portico of the memorial (Subway entrance) bronze images from the Spirit of Freedom statue installed around the parapet of the subway stop. This feature will also include large, four feet by ten feet images of Civil War characters such as Robert Shaw, Luis Emilio, Henry H. Garnet, Harriet Tubman and Lucretia Mott on the south wall of Garnet Patterson School breaking up the current warehouse look and incorporating it into the Memorial Plaza.

In 2014, the Institute of Museum and Library Services published study findings that found that children visiting museums had higher achievement scores in Science, Reading and Math and did better in life than children who did not visit museums. The study also said that children from poor neighborhoods were much less likely to visit museums than their middle-class colleagues. Following the study publication, the Museum looked at the demographics of children from Washington, D.C. visiting the African American Civil War Museum and found the same pattern. Schools East of the River in Washington, D.C. rarely came to the Museum, while some schools in Northwest planned full days when the whole school visited the Museum. As a result, the Museum developed a proposed pilot program that was funded by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities and later by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Under the grant, the Museum recruited three Outreach Fellows to work closely with schools to facilitate student visits to the Museum. The Outreach Fellows visited public and charter schools in low income neighborhoods urging them to plan field trips to the Museums.
In the 2016/2017 school year the Museum transported more than 2000 students, teachers and parents to the Museum where they participated in the School of the Soldier Program and went on a guided tour of the museum in the form of a treasure hunt and explored the Memorial. Students were led on a guided tour of the Memorial Wall of Honor to find the name of U.S. Colored Troops. In honor of their visit, students received an age appropriate book and the Museum Passport to Freedom to take home with them crowning an eventful day of a visit to the Museum.

In the second year 2017/2018, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation funded the program enabling the Museum to add the story of Capt. Luis Emilio of the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry, who took command when Col. Robert Gould Shaw was killed in the first day of battle at Ft. Wagner. Capt. Emilio’s name along with that of 2,000 other Hispanic surnames appears on the Memorial Wall of Honor. Under the grant from W.K. Kellogg Foundation, we were able to employ a Hispanic person to translate some museum material into Spanish, develop a mini exhibit and visit D.C. Schools with a high percentage of Spanish speaking students. The Museum is now able to explain to students how Hispanics fit into the multi-cultural, multi-racial freedom story of the African American Civil War Memorial and Museum. We are endeavoring to get the Museum Passport to Freedom Program funded on a permanent basis.

**Board Retreat, Strategic Planning**

Under the stellar leadership of Chairperson Audrey Hinton, the Board and Staff participated in a retreat to examine the five-year strategic plan, review the mission statement and refine the goals of the organization. The retreat was held at the Cambria hotel and was facilitated by a professional from the Smithsonian museums. We are currently awaiting a draft report from the facilitator and will circulate it as soon as possible. The event was a great success that brought the Board and Staff into a closer working relationship.

**20th Anniversary**

July 18, 2018 will mark the 20th Anniversary of the African American Civil War Memorial and Museum. Along with the Board, we are busy planning a milestone celebration that will feature workshops and lectures remembering the past and current success and looking forward to the future. We are also calling for a reunion of descendants that will feature some of the celebrity descendants that we have come to discover. We will also feature a display by the architects, planners, and curators of new exhibits for the museum expansion including a presentation of new items that are to be displayed in the new museum. By July, we should have a substantial number of persons who have purchased ceremonial bricks to be displayed on the “Brick Wall of Freedom.” This will help fund new exhibits and start an endowment fund to assure future sustainability of the Museum. Our goal is to raise $5 million in time for the 2020 opening of the new Museum. As a planning tool, please remember we are six months away from our 20th Anniversary in July of 2018 and 30 months away from the grand opening of the new Museum at Grimke.