

## Grosse Pointe Historical Society Opportunities for Support

### Background and introduction

The Grosse Pointe Historical Society (GPHS) is a 501c3 nonprofit located in Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan with a mission of collecting, preserving and sharing the history of all 5 Grosse Pointes.

In the 1990s, the group acquired and restored the oldest structure in the Pointes, the "Provencal-Weir House," (PW House) a c. 1823 original ribbon farm house relocated in the early 20th century to a location on Kercheval in Grosse Pointe Farms. Subsequently a c. 1836 log cabin from Macomb County was restore and moved to the grounds.

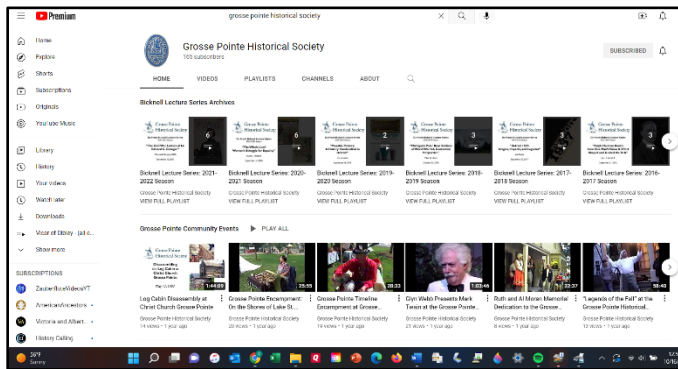


A longtime need for a permanent home -- a multi-purpose building for education, exhibits, administration and collection resources was completed in Fall, 2022. Located directly across Kercheval from the PW House, the 5000 sq ft building includes space for collections storage, a digital lab, and flexible exhibit/activities space.



Planning, fundraising and construction of the building took place against the backdrop of the Pandemic. This proved a catalyst for innovation and revitalization for GPHS. Collections in storage and on-site tours, programs and events shut down, and staff worked remotely. For example, a YouTube channel was created for the long-running Bicknell Lecture Series, previously an in-person-only event. Additional content was

added and a subscriber list for the Grosse Pointe Historical Society has grown and added memberships to the group. In partnership with University Liggett Schools instructors and students, a research and writing project created new web content. A podcast project was initiated, again with student-creator content.



[GPHS YouTube Channel](#)



[PODCAST: Carrie Nation's link to Michigan](#)

The largest fundraising event, a summer gala at a private home was cancelled for 2020. Revived in 2022, the event took place on the grounds of the Grosse Pointe Academy, a venue with ties to 400 years of area history, offering an opportunity to educate and entertain in a "community resource" location in partnership with another organization.

While capital campaign fundraising was curtailed by the Pandemic, visionary donors and construction financing allowed construction on the new building to begin in Spring 2021 and finish on time and on budget in Fall 2022. "Legends of Fall" was held in mid-October. It included a free event with an historic storyteller and music, dancing, an exhibit and refreshments. Staff and collections moved into the the building in late 2022.



The closing and eventual reopening imposed by the Pandemic proved detrimental to some nonprofit organizations. However, it proved a litmus test of vision, purpose and mission for GPHS.

As its 80th anniversary approaches, with the new building complete and staff, volunteers and events returning, the present and future are bright and the opportunities many, relevant and exciting.

## Opportunities to make an impact

### Education

Long-running programs at the Provencal-Weir House included the One Room Schoolhouse program, Ribbon Farm Days (a summer camp format), and School Tours. These have created generations of history-comfortable residents with fond memories of visiting the PW House during elementary school years. Programming like this can become much more robust with the resources of the new building.



Re-thinking Educational Programs offers opportunity to expand the focus to cover a broader range of Grosse Pointe and regional history, incorporate digital components and integrate with school curriculum goals and requirements while partnering with other Grosse Pointe community organizations, like the GP Libraries, and public and private schools.

Support for Educational Programs would have a long-term impact leading to stronger partnerships with area schools and reinforcing familiarity and fondness for local history in tomorrow's community residents.

### Exhibits

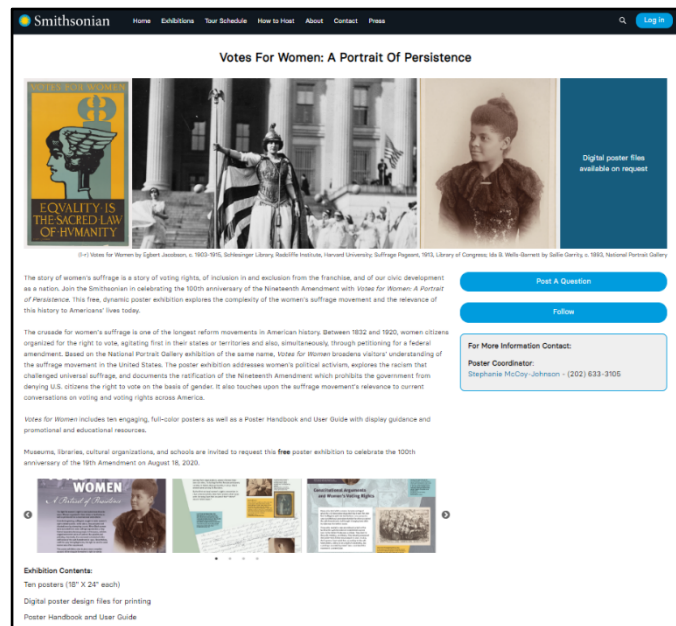
The new Grosse Pointe History Center has three flexible spaces which can be used for exhibits, presentations and programs. An important goal is to create a permanent Grosse Pointe History overview exhibit in the Reception area and West Gallery. A combination of panels, video and artifacts will serve many purposes and audiences.



The East Gallery will feature periodically-rotating rather than permanent exhibits, to counter the "inoculation" risk inherent to historical societies (visit once, be vaccinated with the narrative, and never visit again). It will provide the opportunity to integrate activities, programs and partnerships and respond to community interest.

For example, the Smithsonian Institute offers travelling, poster, build-it-yourself and Museum on Mainstreet exhibits which offer affordable opportunities to bring professionally-curated exhibits to the Pointes and elevate items from the GPHS collections.

These could serve to bring out items of interest in the community, too, which could be added to the collections physically or as digitally-accessible items.



### [Smithsonian Institute Travelling Exhibitions](#)

## **Initiatives and Projects**

The collections of the Grosse Pointe Historical Society so far only scratch the surface of the rich local history resources in the community. A permanent home with appropriate conditions for collections storage, digital resources to preserve, showcase and share information will establish GPHS as a credible, permanent and trustworthy repository and resource. This will bring forward many more collecting opportunities – both physical and digital.

The Society is “in the middle, at the beginning.” The building is now complete with 2500 feet of dedicated space for collections and digital undertakings. However, the collections are in storage and need to be repopulated and organized properly for the new situation. The foundation for information is PastPerfect museum management software <https://museumsoftware.com/> which will serve the organization well going forward.

### [Building the virtual collection](#)

The ultimate destination for all collecting, cataloguing and documentation is information that can be available in a digital format. This work is a perfect opportunity for participation by history, architecture, and museum studies interns, and dedicated volunteers with a passion for buildings and houses.

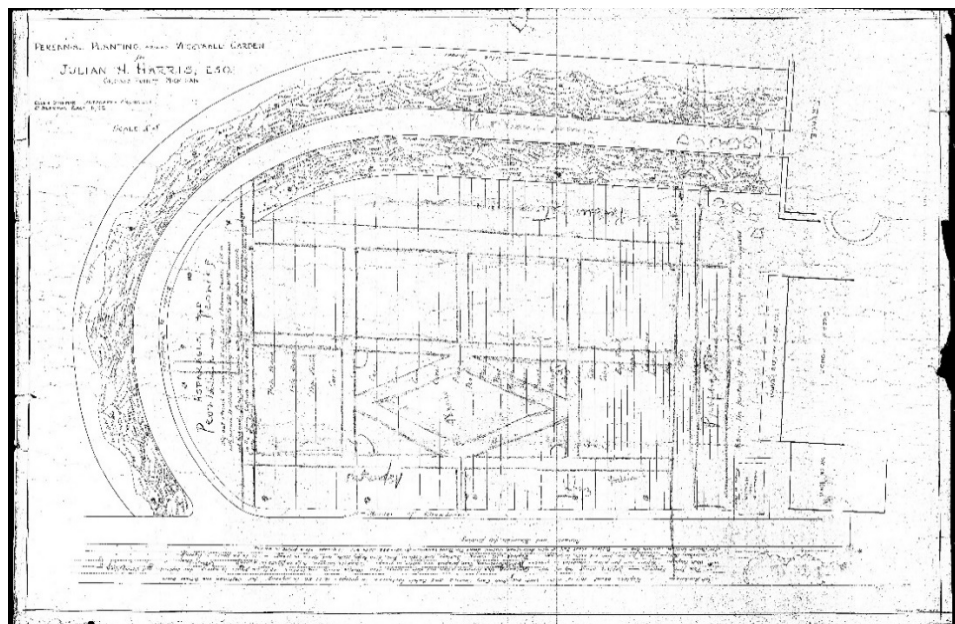
The GPHS holdings are a treasure for the community, but not easily accessible in their current format. They are also a prime opportunity for ongoing earned revenue for the Society. Support to build the virtual collection is the proverbial “teaching you to fish, so you can fish for yourself.” Earned revenue must be a part of the funding mix for every responsible community nonprofit organization.

Digitizing, cataloguing and referencing and properly storing with archival materials for the collection is a large project, which could be undertaken over time and may be one which could be funded by private and grant resources – Institute of Museum and Library Sciences (IMSL) <https://www.imls.gov/grants/grant-programs> is an obvious resource for what would likely be a multi-year project. Initial funding from a private source would be invaluable for capacity building to the point where GPHS would be a successful application for IMSL funding and additional foundation support. GPHS collections exist in key categories:

### Blueprints

The most-requested item from the public – “do you have the blueprints for my house?” GPHS has almost 5000 blueprints. Many have received basic cataloging, but more flow in and need to be accessioned. Additionally, we receive digital versions of blueprints retained by current homeowners are being added to the collection.

Needs for this collection include cataloging, organization and proper storage; long-term the goal is to digitize all blueprints. Many of these approach 100 years old. Having the blueprints in a digital format allows for preservation, better searching and monetizing the collection by selling prints.



*Plan for garden plantings by month at the home of Julian H. Harris on Windmill Pointe. The home was by Buck Stratton; the gardens designed by Ellen Biddle Shipman. Her archives are at Cornell, but they do not include these plans. When made available in online collections from the Grosse Pointe Historical Society, scholars will be able to discover and study these documents – and learn about GPHS.*

### Street and home files

Of primary interest to the public are the “By street and home” files. These are all paper-based files collected over 45 years of information, filed by street and address for homes in the Pointes. Contents for each folder vary – from a few real estate listing cards over time, to extensive information including newspaper articles, magazine references, past owner info, photos and more.

As with all items on paper, they need to be digitized . . . and also properly catalogued in PastPerfect so they are searchable. To be of value and use, this is manual work to be done by trained workers.

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### Photo collection

Photo files in the GPHS collections have served as the basis for [multiple books](#) about the community. The vast majority of the collection is physical, not digital, and not catalogued and cross referenced. In addition to paper files (bad for storage), there are many additional groups of as-yet-uncatalogued photos.



*These photos of the interior of a since-demolished home on Three Mile Drive recently surfaced in a family collection. They allowed GPHS to scan and add them to the digital collections – preserving and making accessible these insights without actually giving up their original photos.*

### Omnium Gatherum

- Podcasts
- Online virtual exhibits
- Local history content for web sites
- Exhibits and publications
- Internships for high school and college students

These are all opportunities for initiatives that can take place in a short time period or extend over multiple years.



[Online “virtual exhibit” Stonehurst and The Schlotman Family](#)

**Infrastructure/capacity building**

Support for capacity building and infrastructure consulting and implantation could be potentially seem esoteric or dry to private supporters. Funding for the work often comes from foundations and grants. However, the Return on Donor Investment” potential is huge and the work of great and long-lasting value to a nonprofit organization.

GPHS “needs it all” as it expands space, potential, budget, needs, staffing, collections and public services. Support for doing it at the beginning, rather than over time in response to shortcomings, would be a visionary investment.

Organizational infrastructure work

The Grosse Pointe Historical Society conducted a Strategic Planning Session in 2009 under the direction of arts and nonprofit leader, Maud Lyon. Revisiting those plans 13 years later it’s reassuring to see that the issues and goals have been consistently addressed and led to the new building. With the opening of a new chapter, it’s the perfect time to do the work and self-evaluation of **Strategic Planning**.

Implementation of Strategic Plans will need appropriate board, staff, and volunteer plans, with defined roles, responsibilities and relationships. An **Organizational Structure and HR Plan** would accomplish that in a deliberate and intentional way.

**A Professionally-Designed Funding Plan** would be of great value. To maximize the efforts of board members, volunteers and development staff, it would be beneficial to have them working to a master plan rather than re-inventing the wheel, or not maintaining a good balance of funding on a long-term basis. Ideally, GPHS should have a “many-legged stool” of revenue: membership, events, programs, earned revenue from research and the collection, grants of various types, sponsorships, donations, planned giving, specific program endowments and general support endowment income. There should be a defined plan and process for each of these.

**Programming Strategy and Planning** is another area which would benefit from professional-consultant-led research: capacity/capability assessment, competitive environment analysis, partnership potential, audience evaluation, community needs and interest survey, and alignment with educational institution

goals and interface. The final product of this process would be a five-year plan for programming, along with a list of needs and steps to accomplish.

### Digital and operational infrastructure

Communications, membership and donor stewardship and growth, donor recruitment, retention and management are all best-managed with integrated, current-generation, web-based platforms. PastPerfect Museum Management Software will always be at the core of collections, virtual exhibit and cataloging work, however GPHS would benefit greatly from:

- Revamped web site, incorporating content from [www.gphistorical.org](http://www.gphistorical.org) and [www.historicgrossepointe.org](http://www.historicgrossepointe.org) on a current-generation WordPress CRM platform with easy content management, integrated with:
- A web-based donor relations/management CRM and
- Comprehensive HTML e-mail system with integrated e-mail, text messaging, social media management

### Hardware

While GPHS has many of the critical tools for digitizing the collection, there are some significant needs plans move forward on digital initiatives and scaling for public access and volunteer and intern involvement:

- Blueprint scanner
- High quality large format printer
- Commercial copier/printer
- Computer work stations for interns and public access
- Large video monitor and stand for public presentations

### **Legacy**

Substantial gifts over the decades have made possible the acquisition and restoration of the PW house; collection activities, access and programming for the public; and the recent visioning and construction of the new building. This project required financing as well to bring it to completion. Capital campaign gifts to pay off the mortgage will mean that more current income will go to direct programming and activities.

A permanent fund was established at Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan in 2015. Income is being allowed to accumulate. The long-term goal for this is capital of at least \$500,000 to provide permanent income for necessary expenses like staffing as well as fund future innovation. Gifts to this fund are to CFSEM, with GPHS as the perpetual designated beneficiary.

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“Local History” groups, perhaps more than other community non-profit organizations, reflect the interests, fashions and passions of the community. GPHS has consistently evolved to embrace more and more professionalism and balance and serve as a resource to all the Pointes and the varied interests of the community.

Along the way, the enthusiasm and just plain fun of learning and sharing more about the Pointes has not diminished. Our founders and supporters have been people of vision and commitment, seeing both the past and beyond their own horizon, and ensuring that Grosse Pointe history is preserved and shared.