

Mahone Bay Settlers Museum

Community Discussions Summary



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Acknowledgments

The Mahone Bay Founders Society would like to thank each of the participants for their thoughts and insights. Every person in attendance shared views and ideas that will help the Settlers Museum to develop an interpretive plan that engages our local community and our visitors. We look forward to keeping this dialogue open and hearing more from the community in the future.

Thank you!



Introduction

The Founders Society has worked towards developing an interpretive plan for the Mahone Bay Settlers Museum for several years. In 2011, the Founders Society hired museum consultants, Sally Warren and Barbara Richman, to conduct a community engagement initiative that surveyed many local residents to determine what made a great community museum. The findings from those surveys guided new exhibits and initiatives and identified the museum's strengths and challenges.

In the fall of 2014, the museum received a Strategic Development Initiate grant from the province of Nova Scotia. This grant allowed the Founders Society to hire a museum professional to develop an interpretive plan to guide the museum's exhibits and programs. The interpretive plan will identify the museum's interpretive themes and determine which themes require further development. These themes represent the stories, both past and present, which are relevant to Mahone Bay and area. In order to ensure that the plan reflects the needs and interests of the community, the museum hosted three community discussions to receive feedback from local residents to help create an interpretive plan that is relevant and engaging.

The following pages represent a summary of the thoughts and ideas presented at the community discussions in January 2015.

Discussion Goals

The community discussions had three goals:

1. Identify which local stories and subjects are important to the community.
2. Determine the museum's strengths and challenges.
3. Determine ways to increase community engagement.



Discussion Format

The community consultations used the World Café style of discussion. World Café discussions have a welcoming atmosphere and are meant to make people feel comfortable and to encourage participation from everyone. The discussions were hosted in the community room at the Mahone Bay Centre. Tables were set-up around the room with four or five chairs. Participants were invited to sit at a table of their choosing. Flip-chart paper, response templates, pens, and markers were provided so that participants could record their thoughts and ideas.

Each of the three community consultation sessions were identical and had three rounds of discussion. During each round, participants discussed the question presented by the facilitator. One person at each table acted as a recorder and wrote down the main thoughts on flip chart paper and a response template. At the end of the round, one person from each table shared a summary of the main thoughts and ideas that were discussed with the entire room. One of the museum's board members acted as a recorder for the whole group and wrote down responses on flip-chart paper at the front of the room.

After each table had shared, people were encouraged to get up and move to a new table. One person was asked to remain at their original table to act as a host for new people who arrived. Moving to another table gave participants a chance to meet and talk with new people and to share the ideas from the previous round of discussion with other participants. This process was repeated for the remaining two discussion questions.

At the end of the three rounds, participants were asked to share any final thoughts or ideas with the whole group.

Round One

QUESTION: At your tables, take about 15 minutes to talk about some of your experiences with the Settlers Museum. This is an opportunity to describe any involvement you've had with the museum as a volunteer or visitor. What was positive about the experience? What could have been improved?

Visitation

- ◆ Only one visit in 5 years
- ◆ Not a frequent visitor
- ◆ Attend special events
- ◆ Always bring visiting friends/family to museum
- ◆ Visit three times a year
- ◆ Go to museum to access information and research built heritage
- ◆ As a resident, brought children to the museum
- ◆ Son's school project chosen for display in museum
- ◆ Have not been to the museum because it's always there – events are good

“Small museum but can become a museum that is different from others, is unique and truly representative of the community”

Involvement

- ◆ Registering china collection
- ◆ Organizing displays
- ◆ Help the museum with research
- ◆ Volunteer during special events
- ◆ Financially support
- ◆ Museum member
- ◆ Board member
- ◆ General volunteer
- ◆ Researcher for Historic Place Initiative

Positives

- ◆ Moved forward in last few years
- ◆ Museum as a source of “talent” for community
- ◆ Like displays, well done
- ◆ Enjoy Clara Quinlan collection/story
- ◆ Had a positive experience
- ◆ New community projects every year
- ◆ Good for socializing and meeting people
- ◆ Interesting stories from citizens
- ◆ Small museum but can become a museum that is different from others, is unique and truly representative of the community
- ◆ Dedicated volunteers (lots of involvement)

- ◆ Heritage Fair Projects – good experience for local students
- ◆ Family research
- ◆ Enjoyed work and collaboration as a researcher
- ◆ Interesting “stuff”
- ◆ Children’s activities/discover program
- ◆ Interactive projects for kids
- ◆ Mahone Bay of historic significance

Room for Improvement

- ◆ Marketing
 - ◆ Need to decide your message
 - ◆ Not aware of shipbuilding display
 - ◆ Opportunities to market more
 - ◆ Coordinate with bus tours
- ◆ Curb appeal
 - ◆ Better signage for museum, when is it open?
 - ◆ Not inviting from the street
 - ◆ Installation in front to draw people in
 - ◆ Offer place to sit, patio area behind museum
 - ◆ Less welcoming; steep steps, should be more friendly
 - ◆ Eye catcher for front of museum
 - ◆ Bike rack
- ◆ “Wow” factor lacking
- ◆ Didn’t leave much of an impression
- ◆ Panel by the bank left more of an impression
- ◆ More panels outside museum, go beyond museum walls
- ◆ Website could be improved, downloadable documents
- ◆ Disappointed in lack of boatbuilding focus
- ◆ More interactive projects and activities for kids
- ◆ Every museum had “old timey” kitchen
- ◆ More participatory/hands-on
- ◆ More partnerships
- ◆ Appeal to a wider group of interest e.g. genealogy
- ◆ Learning from archives – not as much info as expected
- ◆ Need for better cataloguing of information about town properties and heritage photos
- ◆ Errors in some files and displays that require correction
- ◆ We need our own niche, unique and memorable message
- ◆ Upstairs (shipbuilding exhibit) more interesting
- ◆ Provide group training/orientation for volunteers

Round Two

The museum's current areas of focus are:

Built heritage
Crafts and design
Community narrative
Settlers/settlement and ancestry
Shipbuilding, sailmaking – history and industry

QUESTION: When you think of the history of Mahone Bay and area, which stories and subjects do you think are most important? This is an opportunity to discuss your thoughts on the current areas of focus. Is something missing?

Current areas of focus

- ◆ Built heritage
 - ◆ History of beautiful old homes
 - ◆ Churches architecture
 - ◆ Historic house

- ◆ Crafts and design
 - ◆ Past and present, artisans, art

- ◆ Community narrative
 - ◆ Town characters remembered
 - ◆ Lunenburg County accent
 - ◆ Past and present stories – new comers and current story

- ◆ Settlers/settlement and ancestry
 - ◆ Why here?
 - ◆ How did people come here?
 - ◆ Why is it still here?
 - ◆ Settlers survival, deaths
 - ◆ Settler voyage
 - ◆ Story of settlement – card draws
 - ◆ Development from original land grants to town settlement
 - ◆ German Founders
 - ◆ Where can you find “original” names throughout North America

- ✦ Shipbuilding, sailmaking – history and industry
 - ◆ Make it more of a presentation of our history
 - ◆ Shipbuilding required for settlement
 - ◆ Shipyards, now and then
 - ◆ Impact on community
 - ◆ For cargo trade – merchant shipping
 - ◆ Connection to wars
 - ◆ Marine innovators
 - ◆ Ply craft
 - ◆ Current industry and how it has changed
 - ◆ Sailmaking
 - ◆ Move shipbuilding exhibit downstairs in museum

“Shipbuilding is an important part of Mahone Bay’s history and that is not reflected in museum”

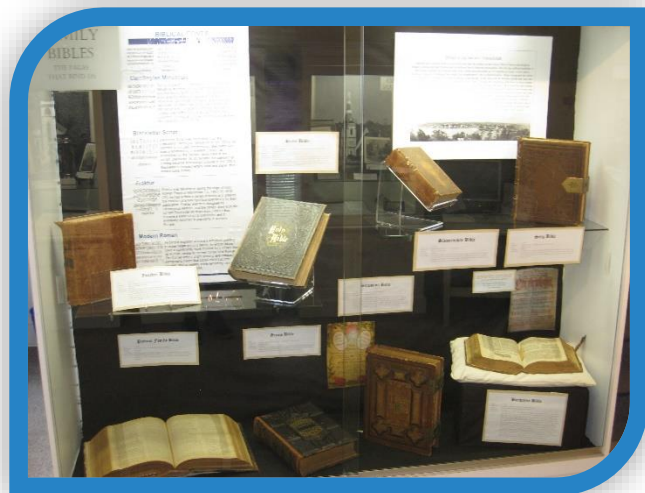
Additional stories and subjects

- ✦ First Nations history
- ✦ Pre-1754
 - ◆ Mi’kmaq, French, Acadian, Scottish, German
- ✦ Genealogy
- ✦ Industry
 - ◆ Lumber, logging, timber
 - ◆ Fishing
 - ◆ Merchant shipping
 - ◆ Farming and agriculture
 - ◆ Mills, power stations
 - ◆ Reinforced Plastic Systems Inc.
- ✦ Islands and island subculture
 - ◆ Life on islands, farms, getting to school
 - ◆ Partnerships with Mahone Island Conservation Association
- ✦ Oral histories, interviews
 - ◆ Have kids interview community members
 - ◆ Interviews with longtime residents
 - ◆ Interviews about work and play in the area
 - ◆ Partner with researchers who have already collected interviews and stories
 - ◆ Video recordings of older people recounting memories and family stories
- ✦ Environment and natural history
 - ◆ Geography of area
 - ◆ History of rivers
 - ◆ Trail system, walking trails
 - ◆ Awareness of trees, old growth, map important trees
- ✦ Women’s history
 - ◆ What were women doing on the 30-acre lots, town lots, and Mill lands?

- ◆ Rum running
- ◆ Racetrack
- ◆ Place names
 - ◆ Indian Point, why is it called that?
- ◆ Layered images of town showing new buildings and lot changes at different time periods
- ◆ The story of the Teazer
- ◆ Global thought – global events that affected Mahone Bay
 - ◆ Wars, depressions, immigration, 7 Years War, War of 1812, Civil War
 - ◆ Changes in technology
- ◆ Captain Steele – Bayport farms
 - ◆ Rare rhododendrons
 - ◆ Form partnerships to preserve the rhododendrons and tell their story
- ◆ Heritage apples
 - ◆ Partner with local apple expert and have walking tours
- ◆ What are the human stories? What did they (kids, women, men, visitors) do around here?

General thoughts

- ◆ Not enough women's stories
- ◆ Not so much old history but our lifetime (3 generations) stories
- ◆ Community history is very important
- ◆ Demonstrate how all the subjects (people, industry, nature) come together
- ◆ More hands-on
- ◆ Importance of interpretation, knowledge
- ◆ How to tell story, docudrama, 1st person interpretation, costume interpretation
- ◆ Partnering to tell stories
- ◆ People will do a lot for their children – make the museum as kid-friendly as possible
- ◆ Opportunity to interest kids
- ◆ Partnership with schools
- ◆ Experience and learning
- ◆ Museum as a hub
- ◆ Looking outside the physical building of the museum
- ◆ Link current websites of business/art/etc. to museum and vice versa



Round Three

QUESTION: What can we do to engage more local people as visitors and volunteers in the museum? What can we do to make the visitor experience more memorable?

Cooperation and partnerships

- ◆ Strengthen and/or establish partnerships with:
 - ◆ Bay View Community School
 - ◆ Cemetery Commission
 - ◆ Chester Theatre School
 - ◆ Churches
 - ◆ Garden Club
 - ◆ Heritage Advisory Committee
 - ◆ Indian Point Yacht Club
 - ◆ Local businesses
 - ◆ Local experts
 - ◆ Local researchers
 - ◆ Mahone Bay Centre
 - ◆ Royal Canadian Legion
 - ◆ South Shore Genealogical Society
 - ◆ The hub
 - ◆ University students
 - ◆ Visitor Information Centre
- ◆ Firefox Magazine concept – partnerships between students and older residents to share and record oral histories
- ◆ Engage other organizations for cross-pollination
- ◆ Build a bank of people who have skills and knowledge to draw on for advice
- ◆ Act as a connector for people with similar interests e.g. built heritage, genealogy
- ◆ Engage university students to develop an app – touring Mahone Bay

“Key for sustainability of museum is to engage local residents.”

Volunteers

- ◆ Infusion of young volunteers needed
- ◆ Invite parents of school children to volunteer after they have been involved from the school side
- ◆ Recruit new volunteers
- ◆ Tap into local talents
- ◆ Offer volunteer training/orientation sessions at least twice a year
 - ◆ Training about permanent and new exhibits for interpreters
 - ◆ Teach cataloguing skills

Outreach

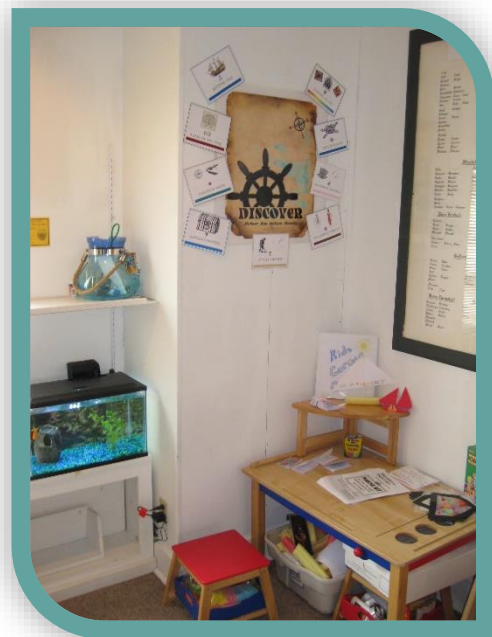
- ◆ Welcome new residents and share information about local history and built heritage
- ◆ Monthly talks at museum or Mahone Bay Centre
- ◆ Establish book club
- ◆ Host authors for readings
- ◆ Outdoor history displays
 - ◆ QR codes/story boards outside museum walls
- ◆ Walking tours beginning at museum
- ◆ Events – open to all
- ◆ Have a presence at other local events
- ◆ More presence in town
 - ◆ Move museum out into the community
- ◆ More street presence during festivals
 - ◆ Engage folks on street and draw them into museum

Emphasize museum as resource

- ◆ Need research space and access to research materials
- ◆ Good place for research (i.e. info on properties, great photographic collection)
- ◆ Impressed by the books available (downside: only available at the museum)
- ◆ Publications – professional research is essential

Children’s, school, and family programming

- ◆ Focus on young people, children/families
 - ◆ Adults will engage when it involves their children
- ◆ Open up programs for the schools – these programs could be used/modified in summer for children of tourists
- ◆ School programs can be adapted to draw in families
- ◆ Kids’ activities as part of festivals and events
- ◆ Children’s corner
 - ◆ Hands-on activities, try on period clothes
- ◆ Scavenger hunt for families



Marketing and communications

- ◆ Increase media presence
- ◆ Share stories and advertise events in local paper
- ◆ Publicize – free listings
- ◆ Mayor’s newsletter
- ◆ More twitter, Facebook presence, engage through social media
- ◆ Accessible website
- ◆ Contact bus tours
- ◆ Expand and collect more email addresses
- ◆ Build newsletter list – interest lists
- ◆ Newsletters and e-mails to keep members involved – what if you aren’t a member?

Creating memorable experiences

- ◆ Experiential and engaging interpretation
 - ◆ Purposeful exhibits – hands-on, story-telling
 - ◆ “Less is more”
 - ◆ Fewer and larger items/displays
 - ◆ Different interpretative techniques
 - ◆ Use of cell phones, how can they be used to the museum's advantage?
 - ◆ Compilation of film clips of different activities
 - ◆ Audio-visual features
 - ◆ Sensory experience
 - ◆ Interactive exhibits – touch, hear, etc.
 - ◆ Activities – relate to your exhibits
 - ◆ Staff “in character” to relate stories, could partner with Chester Theatre School
 - ◆ 3D display – shipbuilding/locations and sites over time
 - ◆ Oral/visual recording of life in town at different periods of time, self-guided tour
 - ◆ Interpretation matters
 - ◆ Hands-on very important
 - ◆ Outdoor history exhibits
- ◆ Local focus
 - ◆ Tell stories of local people
 - ◆ Local photographs “then and now”
 - ◆ Recordings of local stories
 - ◆ Celebration of town’s heritage
 - ◆ Follow a person through time

*“Making the community
the museum”*

- ◆ What's your or your family's story in the community?
- ◆ What is unique about this town?
- ◆ What could make this museum different from every other museum in NS?
- ◆ What to do in town on a rainy day?
- ◆ Local people as treasures of Mahone Bay
 - ◆ Selection of people who have significantly contributed to heritage preservation
- ◆ More museum events as fundraisers like Downton Abbey tea
 - ◆ Tap into young people's interests

Strengths

- ◆ Heritage fair projects – great resource for kids’ research
 - ◆ Great experience for kids to have projects displayed in the museum
- ◆ Willing to do school service on demand
- ◆ Conducted community engagement project
- ◆ Offers offsite activities
- ◆ Free admissions
- ◆ Dedicated volunteers who are very involved
- ◆ Dedicated board
- ◆ Opportunities for partnerships with other local groups
- ◆ Local talents to draw on for expertise
- ◆ Research resources available for public use
- ◆ A place to meet people and socialize

Challenges

- ◆ Limited space in museum
- ◆ Limited funding
- ◆ Window for school activities is small/season for the museum is summer
- ◆ Attracting new volunteers
- ◆ Attracting new members
- ◆ Need to strengthen partnerships with local groups and individuals
- ◆ Need to identify message and gain exposure through marketing
- ◆ Limited access to research materials
- ◆ Limited visitation by local residents
- ◆ Increasing curb appeal

General Impressions

The discussion participants believed that the museum is an important part of the community and they recognized the hard work of volunteers and board members to preserve local heritage. The participants agreed that Mahone Bay and area has a unique history that should be preserved so that it can be shared with future generations.

“Need to record and have awareness of the town history to pass along for other generations.”

Some participants explained that they have been to the museum but that they do not visit often. Some participants said that had visited only once while other participants were active volunteers who spent time at the museum regularly. Ensuring that the museum’s interpretive focus will interest local residents was identified as a way to increase regular visitation.

When discussing the museum’s current areas of focus, many participants voiced their belief that the history of shipbuilding required a stronger emphasis within the museum. Natural history was another subject that many believed was not adequately represented in the museum. There was also considerable discussion about the other types of industry that existed in the area both past and present. Pre-1754 history was another subject that was identified as requiring further interpretation and development. This would include a discussion of First Nations, French, Acadian, and Scottish history in the area.

In addition to suggesting historic stories and subjects, participants also expressed the importance of present day trends and events and their connections to the past. The idea of exhibits featuring examples of “then and now” was a frequent topic of discussion. Relating stories from the past to our present day experiences allows people to establish a personal connection to what may otherwise be viewed as unfamiliar concepts.

Throughout the discussions, participants expressed a desire for stronger partnerships between the Settlers Museum and other community groups. This included other heritage preservation groups, Bayview Community School, local businesses, and individuals to act as sources of knowledge and expertise. Strengthening these relationships and working together towards common goals will increase local engagement and ensure a sustainable future for the museum.

Many participants voiced their belief that the museum needed to increase its focus on children’s programming and family activities. This would encourage new and younger audiences to engage with the museum and become interested in local history and

heritage preservation. It also provides free or affordable, by donation, educational opportunities for local children and families.

There was also an emphasis on the need for the museum to position itself as a resource for local residents interested in heritage research. Providing a space for residents to conduct research will strengthen our relationship with local residents and allow the museum to share its valuable historical resources.

Next Steps

- ◆ Reach out to local groups to strengthen partnerships and discuss future collaborations on community projects
- ◆ Develop school programs with curriculum connections to strengthen relationship with Bayview Community School and increase visitation by local children
 - ◆ Advertise these programs to local teachers
- ◆ Develop a marketing strategy and focus the museum's message to ensure a clear and effective marketing campaign
- ◆ Develop interactive children's activities for up-coming exhibits
- ◆ Work to increase accessibility of museum's research resources
- ◆ Develop and implement the interpretive plan
- ◆ Continue consultations with the community to evaluate the interpretive plan