



# Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums

*By Franklin D Vagnone, Deborah E Ryan*

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In these days of an aging traditional audience, shrinking attendance, tightened budgets, increased competition, and exponential growth in new types of communication methods, America's house museums need to take bold steps and expand their overall purpose beyond those of the traditional museum. They need not only to engage the communities surrounding them, but also to collaborate with visitors on the type and quality of experience they provide. This book is a groundbreaking manifesto that calls for the establishment of a more inclusive, visitor-centered paradigm based on the shared experience of human habitation. It draws inspiration from film, theater, public art, and urban design to transform historic house museums while providing a how-to guide for making historic house museums sustainable, through five primary themes: communicating with the surrounding community, engaging the community, re-imagining the visitor experience, celebrating the detritus of human habitation, and acknowledging the illusion of the shelter's authenticity. *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums* offers a wry, but informed, rule-breaking perspective from authors with years of experience and gives numerous vivid examples of both good and not-so-good practices from house museums in the U.S.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

**"The tone of the book is blunt, but I think that is necessary. The whole historic-preservation industry is so deeply rooted in either a 'Jackie Kennedy' faux-gentility or a dead-white-men's 'this is how history is done, boys!' approach to everything."**? Ulysses Dietz, *Chief Curator and Curator of Decorative Arts, The Newark Museum*

**"I enjoyed reading this book very much. It is written in accessible language, making complex matters very approachable. The authors have also provided a lot of concrete examples, so there is little guessing at what they are trying to say. Virtually anyone in the cultural world could take this book and find elements that are relevant to his or her work."**? Lisa Ackerman, *Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, World Monuments Fund*

**"If you are a traditionalist, you might think that Vagnone and Ryan are heretics, blasphemers or, at the very least, bomb throwers. You may be right. Many of the ideas in this book go against the standard rules of museum practice. But this is, for many historic house museums, a time of crisis, and crises require bold action and creative thinking. The Anarchist's Guide encourages us to think differently, to challenge conventional procedures, to put visitors first, to take risks."**? From the Foreword by Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, *The Cooperstown Graduate Program*

**"A book that is precisely what the doctor ordered for a patient on life support. It is not overstating the situation to opine that Vagnone and Ryan, in the "Anarchist's Guide," have launched an important campaign for change that might well determine the future of the past by starting a discussion that is long overdue."**? Taylor Stoermer, *The History Doctor*

**"The Anarchist's Guide is a timely reminder to think long and hard about what and who museums are for, and about what expertise this requires. Connoisseurship alone does not a great museum make. It is the careful balance of objects, buildings, and people that brings it to life."**? Katy Barrett, *Royal Museums Greenwich, Apollo Magazine*

#### About the Author

Franklin Vagnone has professional experience in preservation, architecture, design, landscape architecture, archive formation and management. He was the Executive Director of the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks (PSPL) for four years and managed four Historic House Museums. In 2008 Vagnone became the Executive Director of the Historic House Trust of New York City, where he managed 23 Historic House Museums. Vagnone has won numerous awards, including two Lucy G. Moses Awards from the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Award of Excellence from the Greater Hudson Heritage Network, and the Award of Merit from the Museum Association of New York. He serves on numerous nonprofit boards, such as the Greater Hudson Heritage Network and the Advisory Board for the national organization Partners for Sacred Places. His expertise and knowledge are utilized as a grant reviewer for the New York State Culture and Arts Panels. In addition to his passion for architecture and preservation, Vagnone also paints and sculpts, regularly writes on his blog TWISTED PRESERVATION, moderates the international LinkedIn Discussion group The Anarchist Guide to Historic House Museums, and tweets about

museums on @Franklinvagnone.

## **Users Review**

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