

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Oregon's heritage organizations expected the state's sesquicentennial year of 2009 to unleash an exuberant statewide celebration of Oregon heritage. However, the opposite happened. The year became a continuation of increasingly tough years that began for most state and local heritage organizations nearly 20 years ago:

- Two long-time heritage organizations closed their doors.
- Nearly two-thirds implemented additional cost-saving measures.
- Others faced futures with aging leadership, isolation and new technology they are unable to cope with.

Even those heritage sectors with clear economic value such as heritage tourism and preservation struggled to explain their economic value.

In July 2009, the Oregon Heritage Commission began to gather information about the status of heritage and to stimulate interest and support for potential solutions to its challenges. This precedent-setting report looks at all of the heritage sectors, emphasizing collections, museums, historic preservation, historic cemeteries, historical cemeteries, historical societies, local heritage efforts, and archives.

This report:

- Identifies eight major issues challenging Oregon's heritage and cites examples to address them.
- Makes four recommendations for fully solving them.
- Lists nine ways individuals and organizations can immediately address the issues.

THE EIGHT ISSUES

Oregon's cultural heritage is a blessing and a responsibility of the present that will inspire great deeds in the future. It is a significant factor, often unmeasured, in the economic, educational and cultural vitality of Oregon's communities. It typically is a public-private partnership in communities, with no single entity responsible for its conservation and development.



Hood River County Museum



*Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center,
Portland*

While these heritage efforts have survived for decades and in some cases for centuries, new challenges threaten Oregon heritage as the second decade of the 21st century begins.

Issue One: Unstable and inadequate government and private funding. Visitorship and requests for services by heritage organizations are increasing at a time when state and counties' funding for operations is declining and private funding is more competitive. This affects not only public places such as museums, but also activities such as law enforcement efforts to stop looting of archaeological sites.

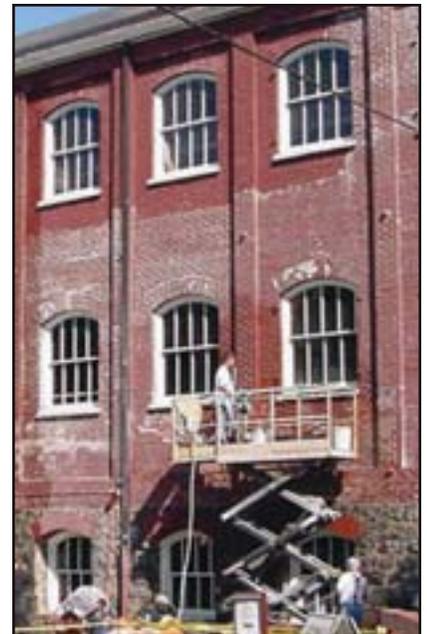
Issue Two: Little meaningful coordination and collaboration among heritage organizations and their communities. Heritage organizations are beginning to recognize that unless they work together and with their communities, their efforts will fail. However, there are many obstacles in developing long-term successful collaborations.

Issue Three: The inability to measure and articulate the economic value of Oregon heritage. Heritage generates hundreds of millions of dollars of economic value annually to the state, but statistical evidence is incomplete or missing. Calculating these numbers will help the public understand the importance of heritage to community economies and education.

Issue Four: Changing educational requirements have reduced the time and respect given history instruction in primary, secondary and higher education. Heritage education is lifelong. Yet heritage education in schools struggles due to national education initiatives, other demands on school spending, and the inability to convince the general public that investment in heritage education is important to the economy and the community.

Issue Five: Shortage of people with the skills and knowledge to address issues of preservation, fund raising, leadership and technology. Location, organizational size, financial instability, lack of leadership and the lack of interest in training has left many Oregon heritage organizations without the skills and knowledge to address their challenges.

Issue Six: Changing demographics and expectations, including developing new leadership. Oregon's population is comprised mostly of people who were not born in the state. Connecting its heritage to these newcomers as well as recently born natives is a challenge only a few heritage organizations have successfully undertaken.



Thomas Kay Woolen Mill, Salem

Issue Seven: Limited use of 21st century communications and advocacy strategies. With no statewide strategy or message about the characteristics and value of Oregon heritage to Oregonians, few organizations have created strategies that maximize connections with their communities or involvement in their activities.

Issue Eight: Uneven development and use of technology. Technology during the past 30 years has changed learning preferences, organizational operations, and communications. It has changed the dreams and expectations of many in heritage, yet disenfranchised others.

THE FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Oregon's heritage is at risk from both external and internal challenges. Some are statewide and nationwide in nature, while others are found within communities and organizations. No single solution, such as money, will solve everything.

The Oregon Heritage Commission recommends that individuals, businesses and organizations re-vitalize Oregon heritage resources by pursuing four goals:

1. *Request that the 2011 Legislature appoint an interim task force to examine state and county financial support for Oregon heritage organizations, and to develop solutions that provide adequate and stable resources.*
2. *Determine the economic and cultural value of heritage to Oregon, including its direct and secondary effects.*
3. *Strategically communicate consistent information about the value and importance of heritage to the economy and daily lives of Oregonians.*
4. *Increase the ability of heritage organizations and businesses to expand their leadership, development, preservation, community-building, communications, educational offerings, and technology.*

The Oregon Heritage Commission urges all who value the significance of heritage in their daily lives and the importance of Oregon heritage to their communities and state to work on these goals.



Albany