

**Arbiter of Tradition and Change:
The Atlanta Historical Society's Role
in an Urban Landscape**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Auburn, Alabama
May 14, 2010

Keywords: Atlanta Historical Society, museum, archives

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Abstract

Traditional writings about historical organizations often treat their operations as independent of the community in which they are located. However, a study of the Atlanta Historical Society (AHS) reveals that, in fact, cultural institutions—museums, archives, and libraries—respond to the community in which they are located, and present an historical narrative that is often promoted by the government at several levels, but particularly at the local level.

After the Civil Rights Movement, and the AHS's participation in white flight, the society reinforced its role as an important archival facility that it had established shortly after its founding in 1926. However, trends in social and public history enabled the AHS to change its focus from the archival collections to the development of a museum. Using professional trends that promoted diversity and serving the community, the AHS museum promoted the city-wide emphasis on urban renewal and tourism. The changes in the museum allowed the archives to maintain its traditional role, thus creating an institution that could claim to serve all.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Establishing Tradition	10
Chapter 2: Moving Beyond Atlanta	37
Chapter 3: Museum and Archives	60
Conclusion	85
References	89

INTRODUCTION

The Atlanta Historical Society (AHS) sits on a wooded lot in Buckhead, north of downtown Atlanta. Located in a residential neighborhood, it is surrounded by multi-million dollar homes; luxury cars constantly pass by its gates. Its name suggests a members-only club for Atlanta's white elite. However, the AHS is not a private club; it is the city's history museum, and welcomes visitors from metropolitan Atlanta and beyond. One would think that such an institution has had a staid existence. On the contrary, upon closer examination, the history of the AHS also reflects the story of twentieth century Atlanta and public history professions.

Atlanta experienced sizeable changes over the course of the twentieth century. It transformed from a regional center to a national and international destination for business and tourism. The city also experienced a shift from white to black political structures. By the end of the 1960s, the biracial coalition that allowed whites to remain in control of city hall gave way to leadership that reflected the changing demographics of the city.

Of particular interest is how Atlantans responded to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, as viewed through the lens of cultural institutions—specifically museums, libraries, and archives. Even if institutions did not play a direct role in the movement, their activities revealed their responses. The literature written about the Civil

Rights Movement in Atlanta fails to include cultural institutions in the narrative.

Although the existing literature does provide useful information, a study of a cultural institution's response contributes to a broader understanding of the movement by showing how all Atlantans were affected by events.

Much of what has been written about the movement in Atlanta discusses it as an extension of a biracial coalition that developed in the 1940s. This coalition eventually broke down in the 1960s as a younger generation grew frustrated with the slow pace of change. As a result, they led public boycotts throughout the city.¹

One reason why scholars have not explored local cultural institutions' responses to the Civil Rights Movement is because they did not respond like grassroots organizations or federal programs. Museums like the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago were established by community members in the 1960s to collect and interpret the experiences of African Americans.² In Atlanta, the King Center was established in 1968 by Coretta Scott King dedicated to the "advancement of the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." Its founding offered a repository for archival and museum material related to King's legacy.³ At the national level, the formation of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in 1965, as a part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, established

¹ For discussion about Atlanta during the Civil Rights Movement, see Ivan Allen, Jr.'s *Mayor: Notes on the Sixties*, David Andrew Harmon's *Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations: Atlanta, Georgia, 1946-1981*, Clarence N. Stone's *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*, and Ronald Bayor's *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*.

² DuSable Museum of African American History, "Museum History," DuSable Museum of African American History, 2010 <http://www.dusablemuseum.org/about/history> (accessed February 1, 2010).

³ The King Center, "Welcome," The King Center <http://www.thekingcenter.org/KingCenter/Welcome.aspx> (accessed March 1, 2010).

guidelines that emphasized diversity and underserved audiences. As part of its originating language, the NEH committed to provide programming in the humanities that pay “particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life.”⁴ Like the NEH, many projects funded by the NEA focused on providing programming to underserved audiences.⁵ These priorities at the national level “trickled down” to local institutions because they had to comply with federal regulations to receive funding. Even those institutions that did not apply for federal funding were affected by NEA and NEH initiatives. Many smaller institutions received funding from state arts and humanities organizations that matched federal funds. Initiatives became sustained as successful funded programs became models for future projects.

Although literature about cultural institutions’ responses to the movement is limited, this does not mean that such institutions did not respond. Established in 1926, the Atlanta Historical Society is an established cultural institution that experienced the changing face of Atlanta. Because the society existed to collect the city’s history, it would have to respond in some measure to the activities of the 1950s and 1960s, and to the emergence of black city leadership in the 1970s. It responded by participating in the city’s massive white flight, continued collecting what it had previously collected—the records of Atlanta’s white elite—and made no immediate changes to its programming. The society’s city funding ended, but it soon turned to the county for the support of

⁴ National Endowment for the Humanities, “NEH Overview,” NEH <http://www.neh.gov/whoweare/overview.html> (accessed February 1, 2010).

⁵ National Endowment for the Arts, “Highlights in NEA History,” NEA <http://www.nea.gov/about/40th/archive.html> (accessed February 1, 2010).

specific programs—evidence that Atlanta’s identity was expanding beyond the city lines to encompass an entire region.

The story of the AHS actually is a story of Atlanta after the Second World War. In addition to the Civil Rights Movement, literature on post-war Atlanta to the present discusses politics, the changing face of downtown, and race relations (beyond the Civil Rights Movement). Much of the physical development of Atlanta during the 1950s and 1960s resulted from massive white flight, which drastically changed the city’s demographics.⁶ In the wake of white flight, Atlanta joined the nation-wide trend of downtown urban renewal—dislocating entire, primarily black, neighborhoods for the purpose of building large structures, such as stadiums and convention centers. In doing so, city leaders and developers viewed such projects as a way to remove “undesirable” populations from the city center and attract investors. In addition, urban renewal was viewed as a way to renew civic pride.⁷ In conjunction with urban renewal, tourism came to dominate discussions of downtown Atlanta in the 1980s, culminating with the 1996 Summer Olympic Games.⁸ Activities at the AHS from the 1960s on certainly reflected such trends: it participated in white flight, established a satellite facility amidst downtown renewal projects, and identified tourists as a primary audience. In doing so, the AHS was more than just an observer of city events; it was an active participant.

⁶ For extensive analysis of the systematic transition of Atlanta’s neighborhoods and the resulting demographic shift, see Kevin M. Kruse’s *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*.

⁷ For discussions about the trend of downtown renewal programs throughout the country, see Bernard J. Frieden and Lynn B. Sagalyn’s *Downtown, Inc.: How America Rebuilds Cities*, and Alison Isenberg’s *Downtown America*.

⁸ Harvey K. Newman’s *Southern Hospitality: Tourism and the Growth of Atlanta* provides additional information about Atlanta’s urban renewal, as well as a history of tourism in the city and its importance to Atlanta’s economic future.

The AHS's roots in its archival collections and its commitment to its traditional role mirrored the activities of many American historical societies. Much has been written about the founding of historical societies in the United States. Many begin the narrative with the founding of the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1791 by the Reverend Jeremy Belknap as the first American historical society. The concept quickly spread throughout the country, often with a focus on collecting and publishing important documents.⁹ The typical narrative then continues on to explain the development of state historical societies in the Midwest that sought to serve a wider audience.

In all the literature about the transformation of historical societies and affiliated museums, none explicitly related activities to what happens to the archival collections. Most American historical societies, including the AHS, began as libraries and archives. Just as trends in public history affected historical societies and museums, they also influenced archival collections.¹⁰

Most of what has been written about individual societies is limited to institutional histories, often to commemorate an institution's anniversary.¹¹ Such narratives often develop within a vacuum—the story of their development and activities rarely addresses

⁹ For discussion on the first American historical societies, see Sara Lawrence's *History of Historical Societies in the United States* and H.G. Jones' *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791-1861*.

¹⁰ The entire 1986 Summer (Vol.8 no. 3) issue of *The Public Historian* is devoted to the place of archives within public history.

¹¹ Works such as Sally F. Griffith's *History in a Changing World: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania* and Charles H. Lesser's *The Palmetto State's Memory: A History of the State Department of Archives and History, 1905-1960* were written to commemorate anniversaries and follow a progressive narrative. Walter Muir Whitehill's *Independent Historical Societies: An Enquiry into their Research and Publication Functions and their Financial Future* does the same, but is written from the viewpoint of an employee of a traditional society facing changes in the 1960s.

the society in which they are located. However, recent trends in public history have utilized institutions as case studies to study how historical societies and museums evolved to engage the public, serve a more diverse audience, encourage dialogue about a variety of topics, and promote democracy.¹²

Unfortunately, the existing literature on the AHS deals in only a limited way with emerging trends in public history, focusing on specific exhibits and collections.¹³ They are rather narrow studies of the institution that do little to place the institution as a whole—archives, museum, exhibits, programming, and leadership—in a broader historical context. This study pays close attention to the changing face of Atlanta and how the AHS actively participated.

The lack of literature on the place of archives within larger cultural institutions is telling. Much of the literature about archives' place within an institution can be found with reference to university and corporate archives.¹⁴ In both, the archives serves

¹² Numerous examples of recent literature exist. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan's *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* shows how studying how people use history affects how institutions shape their programming. Mike Wallace's *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* provides both general explanations and specific examples of institutional responses to changing trends in public history. Robert R. Archibald, writing from the point of view of an employee, uses the Missouri History Museum as a case study to explore ways historical organizations can engage the public in *The New Town Square: Museums and Communities in Transition*. As an outside observer, Catherine M. Lewis writes about the transformation of the Chicago Historical Society from an elite "club" to an institution that strives to engage the city's diverse public in *The Changing Face of Public History: The Chicago Historical Society and the Transformation of an American Museum*. Although Lewis perhaps comes closest to discussing the institution's response to larger society, it is only within the confines of public history.

¹³ Carrie E. Taylor, "Collecting Georgia: A Study of the Collections, Policies, and Practices of the Atlanta Historical Society" (Master's Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1998); Jennifer W. Dickey, "'A Tough Little Patch of History': Atlanta's Marketplace for *Gone With The Wind* Memory" (Doctoral Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2007).

¹⁴ David R. Smith's "An Historical Look at Business Archives," in *American Archivist* 45 no.3 (Summer 1982), explains the primary role of business archives. William J. Maher's *The Management of College and*

primarily an administrative role: identifying, preserving, and making available documents created by various departments. How can archives like the AHS, which do not focus on administrative purposes, find its place?¹⁵ For many cultural institutions, the archival collections lost their prominence as museums attracted increased attention paid to museums. Museums increasingly developed programming around ideas of inclusivity and diversity, and less on collections.

Although the AHS archival collections remained as they were before the Civil Rights Movement, the rest of the organization underwent dramatic changes from the 1980s to the present. Influenced by trends in public and social history, urbanization, and urban renewal, the society expanded its programming by constructing a museum, developing downtown programming, and developing programming that was more inclusive. Although the archives continued to add to its traditional collections, like the museum, it did experience changes. Both the museum and archives were greatly influenced by trends in their respective professions to meet standards.

The story of the AHS in transition certainly is one that responded to the Civil Rights Movement. But, it has also been influenced by the professionalization of cultural institutions, trends in public history, urbanization, and urban renewal. The story begins with the forming of the AHS in 1926. By this time, Atlanta had recovered from the

University Archives explains the administrative element of repositories located within institutions of higher education.

¹⁵ The author experienced difficulty finding desired administrative records. No other researcher had sought out administrative records that were not published by the AHS in newsletters, or were available in still-used databases. This reinforces the claim that, until now, the AHS has rarely been viewed as a part and/or reflection of Atlanta's history. Also, because the AHS administrative records are unprocessed, when cited, they are followed by "AHS Archives."

destruction incurred by the Civil War, and developed into a regional center. A strong African American political structure and voting bloc also developed. Within this context, AHS founders strove to preserve the history of their families and communities—that of elite, white Atlanta. As the century progressed, members continued to collect and present such items, even as the black political structure grew stronger and whites increasingly abandoned the city. Chapter One examines the society’s activities during its first four decades, with respect to events occurring throughout the city. In addition to collecting the papers of elite white Atlantans, the AHS also collected and preserved the papers of the city government, thus establishing itself as a primary archival repository for the city. In doing so, it demonstrates how the archival collections became crucial to the society’s identity and operations.

In the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, the AHS relocated to the affluent white community of Buckhead. This move reflected the institution’s participation in the larger trend of white flight as well as its efforts to expand facilities and programming. Whatever the reason for the move, it limited its audience. Chapter Two explores this idea, but also examines how trends in public history enabled the AHS to change its focus from the archival collections to the development of a museum. In doing so, the AHS also expanded programming intended to serve audiences that may be excluded by the society’s location.

Despite the change in focus from archives to museum, the AHS archival collections continued to serve a purpose for the institution. Chapter Three examines how and why the AHS archives evolved separately from the museum from the 1980s to the present. Museum and archival professionalization caused the two elements to follow

different paths. As the archives embraced the profession's priority of best practices and the use of new technologies, the repository was able to continue to serve its traditional audience: the scholar. Because the museum and archives developed to attract and serve different audiences, the AHS could claim to serve a diverse audience.

The AHS's response to the Civil Rights Movement is very much an integral part of the story. The AHS does not operate within a vacuum; it responds to events in the society in which it is located, as well as professional trends. The story of the AHS is one of an established institution that struggled for decades to balance its traditional role with external influences to expand to a more diverse audience. The story reveals much about the nature of museums and archives, while showing how an archival repository finds ways to operate within a larger institution. It is a story that is not unique to Atlanta; the experiences of the AHS can be found in urban historical societies throughout the country. It can serve as a model for a new type of scholarship that moves well beyond a traditional institutional history.

CHAPTER ONE

Establishing Tradition

Cultural institutions do not operate within a vacuum—they enjoy a close relationship with broader society. They can reflect societal forces at play. Institutions can both drive changes within society and maintain the status quo. From its founding in 1926 until the 1960s, the Atlanta Historical Society responded to the geographic community in which it was located. The AHS viewed itself as an organization that traditionally served the white elite and expanded to serve the white middle class and business interests. This audience represented the original white power structure of Atlanta. However, as the city entered the 1960s, it began to experience a shift in political power from white to black. Those involved with the AHS saw their place in society challenged. At first glance, it may appear that the AHS did not respond to the changes occurring in the city. But upon deeper inspection, the AHS did respond to changes by rooting itself in tradition. The society's decision to maintain its traditional role is a contested one, with multiple voices and varied motivations involved in this process.

The AHS developed out of a national trend of collecting by the elite and an increasing amateur interest in history. The formal incorporation of the AHS continued a trend of Atlanta's white elite to collect their history.¹ From its inception in 1926, to the

¹ Franklin M. Garrett, "A Short Account of the Atlanta Historical Society," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 63, no.1 (Spring 1979), 100. The Atlanta Pioneer and Historic Society met several times in 1870 before disbanding.

mid 1960s, the primary activity of the AHS was the collection of white, elite Atlanta. In its early years, the society established a trend of collecting materials from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With the exception of materials directly associated with members, collections were limited to the past. The papers of individuals included those of civic and social leaders and local and state politicians. Most city and county records collected were created prior to 1950, fitting the emphasis on collecting early Atlanta. In a way, the society clung to a time when white Atlantans controlled the city. Beginning in the 1940s, Atlanta's African American population began to form a strong voting bloc, and its leaders pushed for increased participation in local government. The society's archival collections omitted this change. However, the collections that developed at this time did reflect larger trends in Atlanta. The City of Atlanta contracted with the AHS to participate in the culling of city records beginning in the 1940s; society staff helped to determine what records would be preserved; in return, the city provided financial support.² In doing so, the society established itself as a major collecting institution in the city. Because of members' involvement in city operations, the AHS became an institution tied to the reigning business and political interests. Consequently, the items selected for preservation from the city records supported Atlanta's white interests. The AHS archival records collected since the 1940s, still the foundation of the present collections, reveal the nature of collecting, and reflect the racial and class struggles that occurred in Atlanta during much of the twentieth century.

The establishment of an urban historical society reflected the growth of Atlanta and its new role as a regional power. Atlanta developed around the railroad. In 1836, the

² *Constitution*, 21 June 1956, Scrapbook 3, 1956-61, AHS Archives.

Western and Atlantic Railroad was built across Georgia.³ The area around the eastern terminus was named Terminus in 1837. A decade later, Terminus was renamed Atlanta and incorporated in December of 1847. The close relationship with the railroad made Atlanta a city of commerce from the beginning. The city rapidly grew during the following decade and cemented its regional primacy during the American Civil War. The Confederacy designated the city as the military supply center. Numerous government agencies made Atlanta their regional headquarters. As a result, the city received the nickname, “Little Washington of the South.”⁴ Sherman’s 1864 campaign in and around Atlanta cut off supplies in and out of the city, and destroyed many buildings.⁵ Despite the destruction, Atlantans rebuilt their city and reclaimed their position as regional center. The city embraced *Atlanta Constitution* editor Henry W. Grady’s image of a New South that replaced plantations with diverse industries to ensure economic growth and stability.⁶

By the 1890s, the dominant classes’ attitude toward history began to change. Upper and middle-class men and women established ancestral societies and historical associations in great numbers.⁷ The public’s interest in the activities of local historical societies increased significantly during the twentieth century. A number of factors influenced this trend. At the turn of the century the public became increasingly

³ Workers of the Writers’ Program of the Works Progress Administration in the State of Georgia, *Atlanta: A City of the Modern South*, American Guide Series (New York: Smith and Durrell, 1942), 56.

⁴ Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City 1946-1996* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996), 30.

⁵ James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 746-60.

⁶ George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007) 2: 706-707.

⁷ Michael Wallace, “Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States,” in *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, ed. Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 139.

concerned about preserving the history of cities that were undergoing architectural and demographic changes. Organizations, such as the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution (1889 and 1890, respectively) and the Mayflower Descendants (1897), emerged.⁸ Groups also set about rescuing old buildings and displaying them to the public (historic house museums), preserving battlefield sites, and erecting shrines and monuments. The vast cultural changes brought on by commemoration prompted some groups to preserve the history of communities' founding families.

Such activities spurred an increased interest in collecting, beginning with the elite. American collectors continued the European trend of collecting. In her study of the European collecting tradition, Susan Pearce writes that “all societies use objects as they do language: to construct their social lives.” European history and contemporary European society show how a huge investment of social capital is dedicated to the production and use of goods, in contrast to other traditions in the world. American society adopted the European value of objects. Within this context, individuals transform objects that are often ordinary commodities into sacred objects. In addition, the collections of related objects often hold more value than each item individually. Ultimately, the study of what a group collects—in this example, the AHS—reveals how the group attempts to understand the society in which it is located, and to “reconcile them to their place within it.”⁹

⁸ Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 7.

⁹ Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into collecting in the European tradition* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 20-29.

J. Pierpont Morgan exemplified the American collection mania of the early twentieth century. He invested millions of dollars on items such as books, paintings, and manuscripts. Upon his death, he donated his entire art collection to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.¹⁰ Israel K. Tefft, one of the founders of the Georgia Historical Society, began his collection with autographs. Eventually, the collection included complete sets of autographs of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Upon his death, Tefft's collection consisted of over 25,000 items.¹¹ The collecting of the rich eventually transferred to lower classes, further driving a sort of collection mania.

The elite influences on the development of historical societies mirrored the development of museums during this time. Before the development of consumer societies, only the rich could afford to collect. Their tastes and chosen narratives selected which documents and objects would be collected. When museums developed, the elite controlled them, further narrowing what was being collected and displayed.¹² Naturally, the presentation of an historical narrative emphasizing the elite attracted primarily upper-class visitors.¹³ Russell Belk writes, "While collectors and museums did not invent power-based hierarchies of social class, race, nationality, and gender, they do more than

¹⁰ Neil Harris, *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 251-274.

¹¹ H.G. Jones, *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791-1861* (Chapel Hill: North Caroliniana Society and North Carolina Collection, 1995), 104.

¹² Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (New York: Routledge Press, 1995), 152.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 108.

simply reinforce them. By collecting and exhibiting artifacts of prestige and power we concretize and sanctify these inequalities.”¹⁴

When the AHS began collecting in 1926, it sought to collect the history of Atlanta’s white elite.¹⁵ Members felt that only a limited number of Atlantans knew and appreciated their city’s history. Through its activities, the society believed that its greatest contribution to the community would be filling the “gaps” in Atlanta’s history. The history members wanted remembered included the city’s progress by white elite leadership and the benevolence of Atlanta’s white citizens.¹⁶ Such practices were not limited to the AHS. Historical societies throughout the country focused on the collection of documents relating to the white experience. AHS members sought to collect the papers of individuals, as well as documents from social and civic groups. In addition, the society’s earliest scrapbooks did not document AHS activities; rather, they sought to document the contemporary activities of white Atlanta. Early donations to the society’s collections included a number of invitations and menu cards from various contemporary club and association dinners.¹⁷ AHS members hoped that such compilations would provide future generations with a select narrative of the city’s history.

¹⁴ Ibid., 155.

¹⁵ Until the AHS opened its new archival facility in 1976, the society solicited archival donations through the member newsletter. Each issue included a “wish list” of items, including Civil War books and periodicals, Atlanta newspapers, school annuals and newspapers, city directories, the published works of Atlanta authors and poets, etc. This suggests an institutional shift in priorities in the late 1970s from collecting to programming and from archives to museum.

¹⁶ This was the traditional role for many historical societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Institutions such as those in Chicago, Detroit, and New York, as well as the Filson Historical Society in Louisville, were founded by white elites and sought to collect items that reflected their achievements.

¹⁷ The Atlanta Historical Society, *The Atlanta Historical Bulletin*, 1 No.1 (September 1927).

In addition to collecting the documents of Atlanta's elite, the AHS quickly established itself as the owner of a valuable Civil War collection. Atlanta's role in the war sparked an interest by many Atlantans, including numerous society members and leadership. Society directors Colonel Allen P. Julian, Beverly DuBose, Sr., and Franklin Garrett each acquired sizeable personal Civil War collections that were eventually contributed to the AHS.¹⁸ Their interest, as well as the attention caused by the Civil War centennial, continued the society's emphasis on collecting personal accounts of the war and numerous military documents

The manuscript, and later museum, collections of the AHS essentially became a collection of individual collections. As a result, the collecting activities and preferences of individual collectors significantly impacted institutional collections. This resulted in museum collections that are not representative of their communities, but rather, reflect the tastes of upper-class donors. As such, the AHS presented the historical narrative of Atlanta and the surrounding region as supported by the interests of a select few. Atlanta's elite white citizens donated their collections to the AHS for numerous reasons. Included were reasons typical of most collectors. People collect objects for historical, financial, aesthetic, and personal reasons. One personal reason for collecting is to obtain a type of immortality. Often, collectors believe if their name is associated with a collection, they will always be remembered. When a donor donates his or her collection

¹⁸ Doris Lockerman, *The Man Who Amazed Atlanta: The Journey of Franklin Miller Garrett* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996), 106, 154, 196. The archival record does not provide much information on the motivations of individual directors and board members of the AHS. However, all were members of elite white families, with multi-generational AHS membership. Franklin Garrett became a well-known figure in Atlanta. As the owner of all editions of the Atlanta City Directory, Garrett was often called upon to make statistical reports before public bodies. In 1973, he was named Official Historian of Atlanta; in 1975, he became the Official Historian of Fulton County. His work was not without criticism. Some wrote that his approach to history was inadequate and outmoded, and that "the selection of a man who glories in the way things used to be for men like him and glosses over the way they were for others."

to a museum, he or she might stipulate that their name always be used when referring to the collection, an object within it, or the gallery in which it is displayed. Even though this does not guarantee “immortality” for the donor, it does ensure that their name will be prominent in the museum. The donation of a large or valuable collection to a museum might also elevate a donor’s status in the community.¹⁹

Museum development during the first half of the twentieth century occurred primarily in cities, and was driven by the growth of industrial capitalism. In addition, museums developed as part of a larger movement to build an “urban cultural infrastructure.” Museums, along with public institutions such as parks and libraries, were intended to provide the urban public with education and recreation. As Steven Conn explains, “this urban cultural infrastructure was designed to turn what was simply and crudely urban into something urbane.”²⁰ In doing so, the ability of those in the urban industrial capital sphere to contribute order and beauty further ensured their status and prestige in society.

The period from 1918 to the 1950s served as a transitional period for historical organizations, combining professional and amateur approaches to history. World War One served as a major stimulus to curiosity about the past.²¹ Disillusioned by the war,

¹⁹ Carrie E. Taylor, “Collecting Georgia: a study of the collections policies and practices of the Atlanta Historical Society (Master’s thesis, University of South Carolina, 1998), 7-8, 21. Included in her discussion of donors to the AHS, Taylor includes Dr. John A. Burrison’s donation of folklife-related materials, Beverly DuBose’s donation of Civil War paraphernalia, and Philip Trammell Schutze’s donation of decorative arts. She suggests that such donors donated for purposes of recognition and to continue the traditional role of the society. When discussing the quilt collection, Taylor suggests that donors sought both recognition and a place to store family heirlooms in lieu of disposing of them.

²⁰ Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 201.

²¹ Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 47.

people looked to their history through the lens of romantic nostalgia. The development of living history sites in the 1920s and 1930s created progressive narratives free of conflict. Henry Ford's Greenfield Village sent the message that life had been better in the old days and had been getting better ever since. John D. Rockefeller's restoration of Colonial Williamsburg commemorated the planter elite that presided over a "perfect" society that, ordered from the top down, exhibited planning, order, cleanliness, and no conflict.²² For academic historians, the New Deal meant a substantial injection of federal funding into the infrastructure of historical research—most importantly, through the creation of the National Archives.²³ For the general public, the New Deal's Federal Writer's Project, through the American Guide Series, encouraged an increased interest in local and regional history.

The increasing affluence of post-war American society meant Americans had more leisure time to dedicate toward an interest in history. Television and radio programs and publications delivered quasi-scholarly information to mass audiences. The urban renewal of the 1950s caused many to become concerned for the preservation of historic architecture that slowly disappeared.²⁴ This increasing interest in history meant that historical organizations had a larger audience to serve. In response to this larger audience, the AHS increased its programming for members and the general public.

²² Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History*, 12-15. Both Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller created historic communities that emphasized order and progress—representative of their corporate interests. Rockefeller's Colonial Williamsburg presented the planter elite as progenitors of timeless ideals and values, the cradle of the Americanism that the corporate elite inherited and guarded.

²³ Ian Tyrell, *Historians in Public*, 177.

²⁴ Sara Lawrence, "History of Historical Societies in the United States," Public History Resource Center <http://www.publichistory.org/features/HistoricalSocietyHistory.html> (accessed August 27, 2009).

During the AHS's first several decades, staff actively used the archival collections to drive programming. They sought to share their collections with public schools and other organizations; by this time, the AHS had already established a sizeable photograph collection (approximately 2500 items) that was used by researchers, journalists, and businesses and organizations celebrating anniversaries. The society collaborated with WSB-Radio to develop an award-winning local history program that used the archival collections as research material.²⁵ Public programming appeared in the form of a Civil War lecture series at a Buckhead bank, and participation in Emory University's Community Educational Services. Both used the archival material to illustrate the presentations.²⁶

The city's efforts to encourage business growth and tourism development greatly influenced the AHS transition from archives to museum. The one post-1950 city record found in the archives hints at the importance of the Atlanta business community; it remains the only evidence of the AHS collecting material from the 1960s. The City of Atlanta: Civic Design and Commission Records (1966-74) reflects the city's focus on physical growth in the 1960s.²⁷ Led by Mayor Allen Ivan, Jr. (whose wife, Louise, was the first female AHS trustee during the same time), the city embarked on an ambitious building campaign, resulting in a civic center, arts center, professional sports stadium, and numerous skyscrapers. In fact, the leadership for this decade drew from Atlanta's

²⁵ *Journal-Constitution* 16 March 1958, Scrapbook 3, 1956-61, AHS Archives.

²⁶ Evening at Emory, Spring 1964, Community Educational Services, Emory University, Evening Short Courses for Adults, "Knowing Georgia" Scrapbook 4, 1962-66, Atlanta Historical Society, Atlanta; Franklin Garrett, "AHS President's Report," AHS Archives.

²⁷ Atlanta Historical Society, *Guide to the Manuscript Collections of the Atlanta Historical Society* (Atlanta: Atlanta Historical Society, 1976), 7. While additions have been made to the AHS archival collections, when the society opened its archival facility in 1976, there was only one post-1950 collection.

white business leaders (in a biracial coalition with black business leaders). This emphasis on business also helps to explain why there is a sizeable business collection.

By 1960, Atlanta's population had reached 1,312,474. In addition, the city skyline was ever expanding. The decade saw the opening of the Civic Center and the Memorial Arts Center. The city now had three professional sports franchises—a certain indication of the city's progress. *Atlanta* magazine proclaimed the 1960s “Atlanta's decade.”²⁸

The collecting of elite white Atlanta continued even as Atlanta experienced rapid change in the middle of the Civil Rights Movement, desegregation, and the accompanying white flight. Instead of choosing to collect documents related to current events, the society collected, as it had since its founding, documents relating to Atlanta's past.

By 1965, tensions ran high among members of the AHS Board of Trustees as they discussed the future of the organization. At issue was the debate about the purchase of a new property in the elite neighborhood of Buckhead in north Atlanta. In the 1940s, one of the founding members of the AHS, Walter McElreath, passed away. In his will he instructed the AHS to receive whatever money remained in his estate when his last heir died. Around the time AHS received this \$5 million estate in 1964, the Inman family offered to sell its antebellum estate at the intersection of Andrews Drive and West Paces Ferry Road.²⁹

²⁸ Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising*, 162.

²⁹ The Inman family, one of Atlanta's founding families, had ties to the AHS. Inmans were members, and Louise (Richardson) Allen, wife of Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr. (1962-70), and granddaughter of Hugh T. Inman, became the first female member of the AHS Board of Trustees.

The discussions by AHS board members about the potential purchase of the Inman estate revealed the numerous influences on individual members and, thus, the organization. The board was divided on whether or not to purchase the property. The society's actions during the 1960s illustrated both a desire to ensure continued participation in greater Atlanta society, as well as a desire to retain its traditional role as a collector of elite white Atlanta. However, the debate that occurred on the night of August 18, 1965, revealed that not every member of the society believed it should continue with its expansion of activities into the greater Atlanta community. While most agreed that the society needed additional space to expand, the potential move from downtown to the northern part of the city revealed the differing visions of the society and of its future. After months of discussion, the board narrowly voted to purchase the property and move north.

The general image of 1950s and 1960s Atlanta as portrayed by both the media and city leaders was one of a "city too busy to hate." Atlantans took pride in their reputation of progressive race relations. White residents desired to combine progress and modernity with the grace and civility of the Old South. The African-American community included an intellectual, politically sophisticated middle-class leadership that wanted political and civil rights. The Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta thus presented a unique challenge to white Atlantans and their desire for progress and civility.³⁰ For the AHS's white members and leadership, the changes posed a challenge to how they would ensure that their business interests remain viable while struggling with their decreasing strength in Atlanta's political structure.

³⁰ David Andrew Harmon, *Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations: Atlanta, Georgia, 1946-1981*(New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), vii,310.

Many trace the race relations of the 1960s and 1970s to the decades following the Civil War. Blacks were attracted to post-war Atlanta because of the Freedmen's Bureau and the promise of employment.³¹ Black Atlantans established a small, but solid, economic base upon which they built a thriving community.³² During the half century that "separate but equal" was the law of the land, blacks in Atlanta built a remarkably vibrant business district of their own. The black business district centered on Auburn Avenue—called "Sweet Auburn," because money was sweet. This district allowed black-owned businesses to thrive, creating a black middle class.³³

Since Reconstruction, some white Atlantans continually expressed hostility toward black Atlantans. Often, this was the result of an irrational fear of economic competition. The city council attempted to establish control over Atlanta's black citizens by enforcing regulations on employment, business ventures, and social venues.³⁴ The tensions between the races erupted in the 1906 race riot. Many scholars point to the riot and ensuing Jim Crow laws as influencing the Atlanta of the 1960s and 1970s.³⁵

In some late nineteenth century elections, blacks supported the white business leaders in a coalition against working-class white interests—a scenario repeated in the

³¹ Allison Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875-1906* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 33.

³² *Ibid.*, 29.

³³ Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising*, 36.

³⁴ Allison Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together*, 23.

³⁵ Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 2.

1950s and 1960s.³⁶ Under Mayor William Hartsfield, post-war Atlanta saw the emergence of a system of biracial agreements.³⁷ This governing coalition, of which many AHS members were a part of, remained strong and retained continuity even as the city experienced regime changes.³⁸ The government's white leadership willingly participated in the biracial coalition in large part because of an informal partnership with the downtown business elite. Downtown businesses realized they needed the patronage of black Atlantans to be successful.³⁹ The commitment of this coalition to the economic growth of Atlanta and the maintenance of an image of racial progress often took priority over racial beliefs and attitudes. The major accomplishment of this coalition was its ability to adapt to changing racial relations, most notably the transition from white to African-American political power. The major weakness was that its policies favored the interests of the upper-economic strata of both communities.⁴⁰ Both groups gained important objectives that could be touted before larger publics. Blacks of all classes, formerly frozen into a restricted area of the city, received land for expansion. The white business elite could point to economic growth and a revitalized downtown that promised gains across class and racial lines.⁴¹ Given the temper of the times, a substantial danger existed that white backlash would overtake even the most progressive of Atlanta's

³⁶ Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 6.

³⁷ Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 26.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁰ David Andrew Harmon, *Beneath the Image*, viii.

⁴¹ Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics*, 37.

business leaders.⁴² As Atlanta moved from the 1960s to the 1970s, the coalition arrangement that had held for nearly a quarter of a century seemed to be unraveling.⁴³ A generational divide weakened the position of established black leaders, bringing forth new and vocal champions of black interests and increased friction between black and white leaders. As civil rights activism, federal policy, and eventually state politics altered the conditions under which black leaders and downtown business elite had achieved their initial accommodation, there was not guarantee that past arrangements would hold. Student sit-ins provided the first test of the durability of established coalitional lines. As the 1960s unfolded, the practice of negotiated settlements gave ground to protests, and a variety of groups openly expressed dissatisfaction with city policy.⁴⁴

With its policy of racial moderation and negotiated gradualism, Atlanta appeared to be an isle of reasonableness in a sea of die-hard resistance. Moreover, while there was tension between city and state officials, segregationist governors were not eager to attack an urban regime supported by Atlanta's economic elite and affluent northsiders. Much of what Atlanta offered the black community through the early 1960s was largely symbolic, but for Atlanta's older generations of black leaders, the city's modest steps represented movement in the right direction.⁴⁵

Atlanta's school desegregation provided an example of the work and eventual unraveling of the biracial coalition. Mayor Hartsfield wanted to both avoid violence and portray the city's approach to race relations in a positive light. The leadership convinced

⁴² Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising*, 140.

⁴³ Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics*, 75.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 51-2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

the public to comply by emphasizing the benefits of racial progress for business; by 1960, statistics had been compiled showing how economically damaging Little Rock's 1957 riots were. The coalition launched a large campaign to prepare the city for an uneventful school desegregation.⁴⁶ The original desegregation plan was of one grade per year. However, federal legislation and lawsuits forced the school board to "fully integrate" in 1965. Refusing to place their children in integrated schools, many white parents moved to the suburbs, resulting in massive "white flight."⁴⁷ By 1967, it was clear that freedom of choice was not working and that Atlanta schools were not desegregating sufficiently, but rather resegregating.⁴⁸ Despite Atlanta's good reputation in race relations, not all of the signs favored a smooth transition. Student sit-ins by Atlanta University Center students began in 1960. Staunch segregationists called for resistance. Emotions ran high, and a cooling-off period was negotiated for the opening of school. After all this preparation, Atlanta's school desegregation in the fall of 1961 involved only nine black students divided among four formerly all-white high schools.⁴⁹

The desire of some AHS board members to move from downtown to Buckhead mirrored the white flight of many Atlantans. During the August 1965 discussion about the Inman home and the potential move, those in favor of the purchase offered several reasons for the move north. John M. Slaton, Jr., expressed the oft repeated argument by Board members that the beautiful edifice of the Inman home would attract people from around the city, despite its location. Media attention surrounding the purchase of the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁷ Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping*, 224.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 237.

⁴⁹ Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics*, 48.

house would increase visitation. He believed the key to the society's success was to attract a large membership with low dues; the house's beauty would provide the attraction and increase donations.⁵⁰ While the beauty of the house provided incentive to move, it also reflected a trend of many white-owned businesses and organizations to follow their customers. In addition, the AHS move followed the relocation of many society members. By 1959, nearly all of AHS board members lived within a half-mile radius of the Inman property.⁵¹

By removing the AHS from downtown, it removed itself from direct contact with a number of civil rights activities. Atlanta's Civil Rights Movement was aided by the city's active and influential black middle class and a large population of organized college students. Atlanta's sit-ins were orchestrated by prominent leaders like Julian Bond, who knew when to work through the coalition and when to work independently.⁵² The major protest took place at Rich's Department Store, the leading downtown establishment. The saying was that if Rich's changed its racial policies, the rest of Atlanta would follow suit. As a result, a negotiated desegregation coincided with the 1961 school desegregation.⁵³

Atlanta University Center students, like others across the South, were inspired to become active in the Civil Rights Movement because of the February 1, 1960, refusal of black students to leave a Woolworth's "white-only" lunch counter in Greensboro, North

⁵⁰ Transcript of AHS Meeting of the Board of Trustees, August 18, 1965, AHS Archives.

⁵¹ Ivan Allen, Jr., *Mayor: Notes of the Sixties* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 31.

⁵² Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising*, 123.

⁵³ Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping*, 34.

Carolina.⁵⁴ Area students formed chapters of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In early February 1964, white students from Emory University, Agnes Scott College, Georgia Institute of Technology, and Oglethorpe University developed an organization called Georgia Students for Human Rights (GSHR), whose goal was to cooperate and support other civil rights organizations in the Atlanta area.⁵⁵ The *Atlanta Daily World*, the city's black newspaper, often refused to publish information about the students' activities, or were critical of the students' activities. As a result, the students decided to start their own newspaper entitled the *Atlanta Inquirer*. Throughout the remaining years of the movement, the paper provided detailed coverage on the students' activities.⁵⁶

The AHS maintained a strong relationship with Rich's department store. In the wake of the student sit-ins, the AHS participated in a Civil War centennial commemoration exhibit presented by Rich's in January 1961. The AHS loaned parts of society president Beverly DuBose's Civil War collection for this "salute to the Confederacy" that was advertised as "thrilling and inspiring, as well as informative...as we reaffirm our pride in our homeland and this heritage that is ours."⁵⁷

This reinforcement of racial segregation by Rich's and AHS reflected the inability of many in Atlanta's white leadership, including many AHS members, to understand how

⁵⁴ Harry G. Lefever, *Undaunted by the Fight: Spelman College and the Civil Rights Movement* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), 23.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁷ Letter from Richard H. Rich to Mrs. Monroe, January 5, 1961, Scrapbook 3, 1956-1961, AHS Archives.

to deal with racial tensions. Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr. later described how he and his fellow white leaders initially approached the Civil Rights Movement. At first, they hoped that the problem would simply go away. Then, in light of the city's pro-business emphasis, determined actions based on economic calculations.⁵⁸

The racial tensions in Atlanta during the 1960s and 1970s were also manifested through housing debates. Settlement patterns in Atlanta had been determined after the Civil War because of high rental costs throughout much of the city.⁵⁹ The urban renewal, relocation, and public housing site selections of the 1950s and 1960s used the basic framework of a 1922 racial zoning law.⁶⁰ Despite increased integration of public facilities throughout Atlanta in the 1960s, the city became more segregated in terms of "spatial patterns" and housing. The city's deep racial divides remained.⁶¹ The communities of East Lake, Kirkwood, Watts Road, Reynoldstown, Almond Park, Mozley Park, Center Hill, and Cascade Heights experienced almost a total transition from white to black occupancy. Despite a small white middle-class countermovement to the process of neighborhood transitions during the late 1960s and 1970s, the inner-city neighborhoods became increasingly African-American.⁶² Between 1960 and 1970, the

⁵⁸ Ivan Allen, Jr., *Mayor*, 35. In his memoir, Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr., writes that when he was on the board of directors at Rich's in the 1960s, they discussed the student's demands in terms of the exact volume of African-American business. Because the volume of black business was relatively low, the board considered making Rich's an all-white store.

⁵⁹ Allison Dorsey, *To Build*, 35.

⁶⁰ Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping*, 54.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁶² David Andrew Harmon, *Beneath the Image*, 178.

city lost sixty thousand white residents, a twenty percent decline in Atlanta's white population.⁶³

The housing patterns created tension between communities of different races. Although all were a part of greater metropolitan Atlanta, a common city identity failed to develop. This further defined the audience of the AHS. Franklin Garrett, vice-chairman of the board and Coca-Cola executive, offered the most visible evidence of this sentiment in the 1965 discussion of the purchase of the Inman property. Garrett was most vocal in his support of the purchase. He agreed with Slaton that the structure's beauty would attract people from all over the Atlanta. He also argued that notable historical societies such as those in Chicago and New York achieved great success despite their location away from the center of their respective cities. Garrett also offered the most pointed response to the issue of increasing inclusion in AHS activities: "We have not been supported by the southside particularly, the east side particularly, so I see no great merit in moving nearer where they are. They haven't been interested in us anyway."⁶⁴

In addition to the numerous examples of the AHS's participation in the activities of many of Atlanta's whites during the Civil Rights Movement, some members also acknowledged how the movement promoted increased diversity and inclusion. For years, the society consisted of an elite group that conducted the majority of its activities solely for the benefit of its members. However, as the society entered the 1960s, it found itself more involved with the community. The city contracted with the AHS to help to

⁶³ Ibid., 177.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

determine what records needed to be preserved.⁶⁵ The society also achieved name recognition by collaborating on an American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) regional award-winning local history program about Atlantan Henry Grady on WSB-Radio.⁶⁶ In commemoration of the centennial of the Civil War, the society sponsored a lecture series at a Buckhead bank. Society staff also provided lectures for Emory University's Community Educational Services—evening courses for adults.⁶⁷ The society even changed its mission statement in early 1965 to what appeared to be more inclusive:

*The purposes of the Atlanta Historical Society shall be to promote the preservation of sources of information concerning the history of Atlanta, the investigation, study, and dissemination of such history, and to arouse in the citizens and friends of Atlanta an interest in its history; to cooperate with other cultural and educational institutions in implanting in the present and in future generations a pride in Atlanta's history and traditions; to collect, catalogue, preserve, and maintain in readily accessible condition every available form of material pertaining to the history of Atlanta and its environs; and to maintain facilities which will enable students and other researchers to make free use of such materials.*⁶⁸

The society seemed poised to continue the trend toward increased participation in the community and the inclusion of a more diverse population.

Herbert Johnson, president of an insurance company, offered vocal opposition to the proposed Inman property purchase. While accepting the notion that the society needed to consider future expansion, he believed the current Peachtree property would

⁶⁵ *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 June 1956, Scrapbook 3, 1956-61, AHS Archives.

⁶⁶ *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* 16 March 1958, Scrapbook 3, 1956-61, AHS Archives.

⁶⁷ Evening at Emory, Spring 1964, Community Educational Services, Emory University, Evening Short Courses for Adults, "Knowing Georgia" Scrapbook 4, 1962-66, Atlanta Historical Society, Atlanta; Franklin Garrett, "AHS President's Report" AHS.

⁶⁸ Attachment to Member Letter, Scrapbook 4, 1962-66, AHS Archives.

allow for this. He also agreed that the antebellum home was beautiful and would draw much attention. However, Johnson emphasized the argument that the purchase would not support the mission of the AHS. Referencing a report from a law firm, he argued that as a tax-exempt public institution, the AHS should be located on a site available to the largest number of people, not just a select minority. As a result, the Inman property should be eliminated from consideration. Johnson believed that any home for the society should be “equally located for those natives and tourists who come into the city.”⁶⁹

Throughout the discussion, members like Franklin Garrett continually emphasized the beauty of the Inman property as the primary incentive to moving north. He also believed that the estate’s twenty-five acres offered an opportunity for the AHS to construct two additional buildings and renovate the original Inman home to house a museum. An archives building would be built to house the society’s sizeable collections, while an additional museum building would house larger exhibits. Garrett possessed a strong voice in the debate and pressed for members to vote in favor of the purchase.⁷⁰ Under the argument that the facility was the primary incentive to move lay the certain influences of Atlanta’s racial tensions.

The pleas of Herbert Johnson and others against the purchase were in vain. A preliminary vote that night resulted in a split, five board members in favor of the vote, five against.⁷¹ By year’s end, the vote turned in favor of the purchase, possibly because of the influence of influential members like Franklin Garrett. However, it also shows that

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. He would get the vote, and become director of the society in 1967. At that time, he pursued his vision of a museum and archives complex.

⁷¹ Ibid.

members like Johnson were also influential enough to convince others to vote against the purchase. The vote was not unanimous, and resulted in the resignation of a board member.⁷² In November 1966, the AHS formally purchased the Inman estate for \$430,712, with an additional \$70,200 spent on the purchase of the original house furnishings.⁷³ For years, approximately eighty percent of the society's general operating expenses came from the McElreath estate.⁷⁴

The heated debate that occurred on that August night raises an important question: why did some members fight for the AHS to become more inclusive and active instead of furthering the society's tradition as an exclusive organization that developed programming primarily for members? The reasons are varied, with many personal issues involved.⁷⁵ However, several national and local events occurred around the same time that certainly influenced the society. Among others, the political and demographic changes in Atlanta, the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the society's receipt of city funding influenced those members that promoted inclusion. In fact, many of those that voted for the move to the white enclave of Buckhead probably did so to "escape" the changes Atlanta experienced.

In Atlanta in the 1960s, the governing biracial coalition was subject to enormous strain. A generational divide weakened the position of established black leaders, bringing forth new and vocal champions of black interests and increased friction between black

⁷² "Transcript of the Annual Meeting of the Membership of the AHS," January 27, 1967, AHS Archives.

⁷³ AHS, Inc. Report, December 31, 1971, AHS Archives.

⁷⁴ Beverly DuBose, "President's Report, AHS," May 27, 1970, AHS Archives.

⁷⁵ The archival record does not provide information regarding individual opinions and motivations of board members. However, available meeting transcripts and secondary sources of board members show that a number of factors influenced decisions.

and white leaders. As civil rights activism, federal policy, and eventually state politics altered the conditions under which black leaders and downtown business elite had achieved their initial accommodation, there was no guarantee that past arrangements would hold. Student sit-ins provided the first test of the durability of established coalitional lines. As the 1960s unfolded, the practice of negotiated settlements gave ground to protests, and a variety of groups openly expressed dissatisfaction with city policy.⁷⁶

In Atlanta, white attitudes toward the black community changed by the late 1960s as blacks assumed a more powerful place within city politics. Due to their efforts during the Civil Rights Movement, and the changing racial demographics of the city, blacks won their place in the city's leadership structure. While the white business community initially resisted this development, it gradually learned to accept the growing political power of the African American community. White business leaders discovered that they needed the political support of the African American community in order to pursue their program of economic growth for the city.⁷⁷ Because many of the AHS board members had close political and economic ties to the city, they, too, saw the need for the support of the black community and, thus, the need to provide inclusive programming.

If local events failed to motivate board members, the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, desegregating public facilities, certainly motivated them. Some board members surely saw Atlanta institutions succumbing to integration and knew that their time was soon approaching, while others would have seen it as an opportunity to finally

⁷⁶ Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 51-2.

⁷⁷ David Andrew Harmon, *Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations*, 310.

address issues of diversity and inclusion. In fact, it is probably no coincidence that the society changed its mission statement soon after the passage of the act. While the act provided a loophole for segregation within private organizations, the society realized that funding and additional government support depended upon its acceptance of societal changes. Consequently, despite possible individual dissent, the institutional voice became one that complied with and supported the changes.

The events of the AHS in 1965 should not be viewed within a vacuum of elite white Atlantans. Their actions were in direct response to the changing world around them. The struggle society members encountered transpired in organizations throughout Atlanta and the South. By 1965, the society was integral to the scholarship and preservation of Atlanta history, so much so that its struggles drew attention. Board members' internal debates were soon made visible through the publication of numerous newspaper articles. Journalists were quick to take sides and connect AHS with other changes occurring in the city. Some wanted the society to follow the path of the Atlanta Arts Alliance, which constructed a new arts complex that remained downtown, providing access to as many Atlantans and tourists as possible.⁷⁸ Others agreed with the slight majority of AHS board members that the Inman house's beauty was too much to pass up, and that it would be more beneficial to create facilities intended for members and scholars rather than the great masses.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Eugene Patterson, "Make Haste Slowly," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 19, 1966, Scrapbook 4, 1962-66, AHS Archives.

⁷⁹ "The Historical Society," *Atlanta Journal*, April 20, 1966, AHS Archives. This article also compared the desire of some members to become more inclusive to the development of the new stadium, another contentious issue in Atlanta at this time.

The decision by AHS members to purchase the Buckhead property determined the society's direction for the next several decades. The decision to move north led to over a decade of renovations and construction. Because of this, and because it took years for the society to recover from the rift that occurred over the purchase of the Inman home, little attention was paid to expanding programming and community involvement.

Even though the AHS was preoccupied with construction, the period from 1966-1976 proved crucial in the history of both Atlanta and the AHS. For both, it served as a transitional period. During this period, Atlanta's Civil Rights Movement experienced significant changes. Beginning in the mid-1960s, the younger generation of activists that came to dominate the movements' leadership (especially SNCC) were greatly influenced by figures like Malcolm X, who emphasized ideological issues, such as the international struggle for human rights, the relevance of class struggles, and a reassessment of "nonviolent direct action."⁸⁰ Although civil rights activists gained a number of victories throughout the city, the city's African American population still suffered from poor living conditions. SNCC established the Atlanta Project to address the poor living conditions for black Atlantans. Project workers focused on grassroots urban organizing instead of traditional voter registration work. The project initiated a black consciousness movement within SNCC, which eventually provided a framework for the Black Power movement.⁸¹ Such thinking encouraged the residents of Summerhill and Peoplestown to fight back

⁸⁰ Winston A. Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid: Atlanta and Black Struggles for Human Rights, 1960-1977* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), xx.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 79-113.

against poverty and police brutality in 1966. These demonstrations turned violent as police used force to maintain order.⁸²

This same period provided an opportunity for the AHS to dramatically change its programming and focus. Although the society elected to retain its emphasis on its archival collections, it could very well have chosen to incorporate into its collections recent material about the Civil Rights Movement and the changes in Atlanta. At this time, there was not yet an institutional push to collect the archival records of the movement. The AHS passed up an opportunity to collect such material, thus limiting its ability to move beyond its traditional activities.

When the new archives building opened in 1976, the AHS reiterated its traditional role as an archival facility for members and serious researchers. However, the society found it necessary to attract new audiences and patrons to keep operations afloat. The 1980s and 1990s saw a diverse, professional staff and experiments with downtown locations and the construction of a new museum building. Such changes were ideologically different from previous years, and would require large investments of money and time. However, the AHS was able to use such changes to follow museum trends of diversity and programming, while retaining the same traditional role it established in 1926.

⁸² Ibid., 114-141. In 1966, the Summerhill Riot occurred in response to the shooting of a black male by the police. This incident served to galvanize the residents into action, resulting in the formation of a neighborhood organization, Summerhill Neighborhood, Inc. (which continued to be active well into the 1990s).

CHAPTER TWO

Moving Beyond Atlanta

With the Atlanta Historical Society's move to Buckhead in 1966, the society participated in the massive white flight of Atlantans in the 1950s and 1960s. In doing so, it responded to the Civil Rights Movement by retaining its traditional role in the midst of significant changes in Atlanta. Even though it appeared that the AHS would retain its position as an elitist "club," it experienced dramatic changes over the subsequent decades. Until the 1960s, the AHS was influenced primarily by the society in which it was located—both the greater Atlanta community and the elite white enclave of Buckhead. In the following decades, the AHS responded to not only local events, but also to professional museum trends.

While the first forty years of the AHS focused on its archival collections, the focus of the next thirty years turned to the museum and additional programming. The AHS experienced numerous changes since its founding in 1926. Such changes, often brought about by outside influences, illustrate the connection between society and cultural institutions. Before the opening of a new facility in 1976, members collected what was of interest to them and designed programming limited to members and centered on collections. The new facility necessitated that the AHS employ a number of professional archivists, librarians, and administrators. Driven by the staff and their

exposure to professional trends, the AHS trustees again assessed their audience. This marked the beginning of a gradual change to engage a more diverse audience by way of museum exhibits and programming. Influenced by social history, the AHS used its facilities to promote the city government's new focus on urban renewal and tourism, thus continuing its role as a mirror of the priorities of local government.¹ The society participated in both urban renewal and tourism through the AHS Downtown facility, and many of the exhibits in the Buckhead museum facility built in the 1990s were developed to appeal to tourists.

The AHS moved from its downtown location to Buckhead in 1966 and embarked on a massive building campaign that resulted in the construction of a new, state-of-the-art archival facility. Well into the 1970s, most AHS activities centered on the new property. A survey of board minutes shows a preoccupation with the renovation of facilities.² Any activities that did occur during this interim were limited to members, and continued to celebrate Atlanta's past instead of contemporary issues. When the renovation of the Inman home was completed in 1967, the activities that coincided with the re-release of *Gone with the Wind* were limited to members. The only activity open to the general public was tours of the home.³

When the new archival facility opened in 1976, it continued to collect what it had in previous decades: the records of elite, white Atlantans. Although it no longer received

¹ Until the change in leadership in the late 1960s, the AHS reflected the city's white elite that ran city hall and their emphasis on downtown businesses. After the Civil Rights Movement, the AHS again promoted the government's priorities—many of the AHS trustees and members were invested in downtown businesses and the promotion of Atlanta.

² Board of Directors Meeting Minutes February-October 1967, AHS Archives.

³ AHS Board of Trustees, "Minutes," September 11, 1967, AHS Archives.

funding from the city, the AHS continued to work with the records of the city government.⁴ In doing so, the AHS reinforced its role as an important Atlanta institution by establishing itself as a key repository for the city's archival records.

Despite the continuity in what was collected, the AHS changed how its archival collections were used. In previous decades, the AHS provided collections, such as its photographic collection, to community groups for presentations and advertising purposes. After World War Two, Americans had more leisure time, allowing those interested in history to engage in public programming. Instead of bringing the collections to community groups, the new facility announced the collection as a "bona fide" research institution intended for scholars. While the facilities underwent construction, the Board of Trustees decided to again make the collection of historical materials the primary emphasis, designed "primarily for the service to the historical scholar, rather than the public."⁵ With the renewed emphasis on collection management, the archives turned inward and did not reach out to the public nearly as much as it had in previous decades. In doing so, it more firmly established the archives as arbiter of tradition. As a result, the museum was able to develop beyond its traditional role by serving a more diverse audience and developing new programming.

After the Inman home (Swan House) was renovated, the AHS took its first steps toward museum development. The society followed the trend of historic house museums and period rooms to display the house's architecture and the lavish furnishings of early

⁴ AHS Board of Trustees, "Minutes," June 9, 1969, AHS Archives. The Board of Aldermen and the Mayor passed a resolution to transfer certain older records to the custody of the AHS. The resolution provided that legal ownership would remain with the city, but would be stored with the society. However, the city no longer provided funding for the processing or preservation of such records.

⁵ "Minutes of the Board of Trustees," March 3, 1969, AHS Archives.

white Atlantans. Upon completion, it became the first major home in Atlanta open to the public on a regular basis.⁶ The house, prized by many AHS members as the primary draw for both locals and tourists, essentially became the first museum object on display.⁷

The AHS purchased period furnishings with the Inman home, which spurred the collecting of similar items. When storage space became available, the AHS added to its material collections, often within the scope of items owned by Atlanta's white elite. One of the society's first formal museum exhibits was the display of European, Asian, and American ceramics, furniture, silver, and paintings collected by the architect who designed the Swan House for the Inmans. In 1983, the AHS displayed approximately 550 costumes donated by the High Museum of Art. For both exhibits, interpretation was limited to aesthetic qualities and ownership; the AHS had yet to mount exhibits that provided interpretation of objects that pushed diversity. Such acquisition of collections occurred before the AHS museum adopted a formal collections policy. In her study of AHS collections, Carrie Taylor argues that the adoption of a collections policy narrowed the scope of collecting and encouraged the inclusion of more diverse collections, thus enabling the AHS to become more inclusive in the 1990s.⁸

The early AHS museum exhibits illustrated the traditional role of museum collections and the transition in the museum profession from a collections-centric focus

⁶ *Manual of Operations*, 1973, AHS Archives. In a way, this foreshadowed the requirement of accredited museums to be open to the public at least 1000 hours annually.

⁷ Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 11. "While most museums—though certainly not all—are built to house and display objects, the museum building itself has increasingly been treated as an object."

⁸ Carrie E. Taylor, "Collecting Georgia: a study of the collections policies and practices of the Atlanta Historical Society," (Master's Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1998), 32.

to one on education and programming. This differed from the AHS archives' focus on collection management and serving the researcher. The AHS's focus on the aesthetic qualities of collections highlights how unique and useless items were often those deemed most valuable in the museum context.⁹ This slow move toward a more inclusive exhibit reflected the gradual changes in the museum profession. The American Association of Museums (AAM) began to develop its accreditation standards in 1970, gradually increasing its emphasis on programming rather than collections. Museum professionals discovered that museum objects could no longer provide the only method of telling stories and conveying knowledge.¹⁰ Visitors desired more interpretive and hands-on exhibits.

Initially, the AHS showed no signs of interest in attracting those that did not fit its traditional demographic. Society leadership encouraged members to promote the society to "those in higher income brackets, to insure future contributions to maintain the level of activity and improvement of the society."¹¹ By ensuring that the membership remained elite, the AHS could entice future members with a claim on status.

The AHS did not necessarily discourage the inclusion of minorities; rather, it continued to pursue activities that appealed to a specific audience. The society continued to co-sponsor events with Rich's department store.¹² Rich's continued to symbolize the struggle to desegregate; many African Americans had little interest in attending such

⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰ Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* 7.

¹¹ "Minutes of the Meeting of Board of Trustees Atlanta Historical Society, June 9, 1969," AHS Archives.

¹² "Events, 1970s," AHS Archives.

events.¹³ Both Rich's and the AHS desired to retain their traditional role as a service to white Atlanta. However, both institutions ultimately needed to attract larger audiences to ensure their financial existence.

Even if the AHS wanted to continue its traditional activities, it soon needed to change. Despite the renewed emphasis on the scholastic focus of the archives, the move to Buckhead marked the beginning of a transition from a focus on archives to museum. Despite its large endowment, the society needed additional funding for operations, and the support of Atlantans, to retain its role as an important Atlanta institution. Even though the restored Inman home drew visitors, admission and member dues could not cover remaining operating expenses.

After 1965, the city government ended its annual financial contribution to the AHS. In its place, the Fulton County government began to provide financial support.¹⁴ This change from city to county funding reveals how Atlanta's identity changed during this time. The city could no longer be defined by its city limits. By 1970, the greater metropolitan Atlanta area included thirteen counties, with a combined population of approximately two and a half million people.¹⁵ The massive white flight of the 1950s and 1960s left Atlanta proper predominantly African American. If the AHS was to continue

¹³ Scrapbook 3, 1956-61, AHS Archives. The programming co-sponsored by the AHS and Rich's was not as blatantly racist as previous decades' programming, which often emphasized the glory of the Confederacy; John V. Petrof, "The Effect of Student Boycotts Upon the Purchasing Habits of Negro Families in Atlanta, Georgia" in *Phylon* Vol 24 no.3 (3rd Quarter, 1963): 266-270. As a result of the boycotting of downtown department stores, black Atlantans developed different shopping habits that extended after desegregation.

¹⁴ 1972 Contract between Fulton County and the Atlanta Historical Society, AHS Archives. City funds were used to process and preserve city records. When the AHS no longer received such appropriated funds, the focus no longer needed to be on archives. As such, the AHS was able to turn its attention to non-archival activities.

¹⁵ United States Census 1970, Atlanta, Georgia. Metropolitan Atlanta has since grown to include twenty counties.

its traditional focus on white Atlantans, it needed to look to the outlying counties and begin to define the city as a region.

Even if the AHS desired to retain its traditional audience, many funding opportunities required institutions to pursue more diverse activities. Funding opportunities for cultural institutions were greatly influenced by emerging trends in public history. In response to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, social historians focused on doing history from the bottom up. Public history developed out of activism and the scholarly response to study how the general public engages history and to expand programming of cultural institutions to diverse audiences. Federal initiatives, especially from the NEH and NEA, encouraged adoption of such ideas; new museums developed to address new topics and interpretations.¹⁶

While some organizations quickly benefitted from the adoption of public history theories and practices, older private historical societies, such as the AHS, experienced dwindling popularity. Walter Muir Whitehall's 1965 report on the status of private historical societies is often referenced by those researching the changes within American historical societies. Several established, well-known societies provided financial support for this project in an effort to discover why older societies had a difficult time staying financially secure. He concluded that while public institutions received large sums of money for the purpose of disseminating popular, "feel-good" history, older institutions, which prioritized collecting, preserving, and publishing primarily for academic historians,

¹⁶ "AAM Reaccreditation Self-Study Questionnaire," October 10, 1995, AHS Archives. By the 1990s, the AHS depended greatly upon funding from the NEA and NEH. Between 1992-1995, \$625,163 of the society's \$1,351,478 received from grants came from the NEA and NEH. Most funds were used for exhibit development and instillation.

were finding it hard to compete. Meaningful scholarship was the price society paid for the popularization of history, thought Whitehill, and according to him, it was not a profitable trade-off.¹⁷

The experiences of the AHS were not unusual. In order for private historical societies across the country to continue operations, they were finally forced to implement more inclusive activities that recognized the changing communities and audiences. The Chicago Historical Society identified the problem of having an image of an institution with elite roots. The society began to create institutional goals to change this image, but soon found that change takes time, often decades.¹⁸ Worried that the term “society” implied an exclusive membership, several staff members recommended renaming it the Chicago Historical Museum or the Chicago Historical Resource Center to reflect the new emphasis on accessibility. A 1988 report prepared for the Brooklyn Historical Society indicated that the local community (identified as nonusers of the institution) had no idea what a historical society was. None realized it was a museum that could be visited.¹⁹ Revised collections policy and society’s mission, and composition of board of trustees began to reflect the diversity of the city.²⁰ The AHS needed to pursue such activities to ensure its success.

It became necessary for AHS leadership to drive changes. Unfortunately, the society recruited its leadership from its membership, which, until this point, lacked

¹⁷ Walter Muir Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies: An enquiry into their research and publication functions and their financial future* (Boston: Boston Athenaeum, 1962).

¹⁸ Catherine Lewis, *The Changing Face of Public History*, 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

diversity and training in the management of cultural organizations. Directors in previous decades, such as Beverly DuBose and Franklin Garrett, developed programming around areas of personal interest, with little attention paid to reaching out to a diverse audience. The hiring of John Ott, an outsider from New England, as Executive Director in 1983, represented a change. Ott had prior museum administration experience, and worked to have the AHS accredited by the American Association of Museums (AAM).²¹ To be accredited, the AHS had to meet a number of guidelines, many of which emphasize public accessibility and preservation and care of collections. These guidelines encourage diversity by being inclusive and offering opportunities for diverse participation, “engaging in ongoing and reflective institutional planning that includes involvement of its audiences and community,” and promoting diversity in staff and volunteers.²² As the pressure from minority groups that had previously been excluded from history increased, museums began to think about the way they could present diverse stories. Museums discovered that if they desired to maintain their “relevancy as institutions” in the changing world, they must embrace new ideas and perspectives.²³ Even though Ott played an important role in the transformation of the AHS, the society ultimately responded to broader community demands.

The broader Atlanta community had changed dramatically. By this time, Atlanta had undergone major demographic changes. One of the major accomplishments of the

²¹ Ott remained at AHS until 1991. During his tenure, he oversaw the Strategic Planning Process that transformed the small historical society into the larger, more inclusive Atlanta History Center (AHC).

²² American Association of Museums, “Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum,” AAM, <http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/whatis.cfm> (accessed November 29, 2009).

²³ Barry Lord, ed., *The Manual of Museum Learning* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2007), 109.

Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta was African-American participation in the political process. Due to their efforts during the movement, and the changing racial demographics of the city, blacks won their place in the city's leadership structure. While the white business community initially resisted this development, it gradually learned to accept the growing political power of the African-American community. White business leaders discovered that they needed the political support of the African-American community in order to pursue their program of economic growth for the city.²⁴ In 1973, Maynard Jackson was elected Atlanta's first African-American mayor.²⁵ 1974 articles in *Ebony* and the *New York Times Magazine* profiled Atlanta's growing African-American middle class and black enterprise. They discussed the success of the biracial coalition. They downplayed, however, the fact that over two-thirds of the Atlantans living below the poverty line were African-Americans.²⁶ Perhaps the most obvious contradictions between Atlanta's image and reality were in regard to economic equality. Despite the presence of a sizeable African-American middle class, a large majority of African-Americans lived near or below the poverty level. While Atlanta had a reputation for being racially progressive, social and economic realities for many black residents were profoundly different.²⁷

In Atlanta, white attitudes toward the black community changed by the late 1960s as blacks assumed a more powerful place within city politics. However, the AHS was

²⁴ David Andrew Harmon, *Beneath the Image*, 310.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 277.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 278.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, vii.

slow to racially integrate. The professionalization of the museum and archives necessitated racial diversity.²⁸ However, it still did not reflect the changing demographics of the city.

Despite its relatively slow response to the changing demographics of Atlanta, the AHS responded to the city's focus on urban renewal and tourism. Using methods developed during the professionalization of the museum, the AHS mounted exhibits and programming that emphasized these city priorities. In addition, the AHS briefly returned downtown, physically participating in Atlanta's urban renewal efforts.

After decades of discussion about increasing the presence of the society to underserved communities, the AHS finally committed itself to serving a more diverse audience. In 1984, C&S Bank donated the Hillyer Trust Building on Peachtree Street (one of the city's first skyscrapers) to the AHS. The society decided to use the building for the new AHS Information Center Downtown. The society viewed the purpose of this satellite campus to "expand the Historical Society's participation in the Atlanta community and to contribute to the cultural revitalization of downtown Atlanta."²⁹

The AHS's efforts downtown were part of the urban renewal efforts that occurred in Atlanta and many other cities throughout the country. Initial efforts, begun in the post-war years, focused on retail centers as a way to attract white citizens downtown to support the business district's property values. Many redevelopers and retailers believed that the "co-mingling of all groups regardless of race, nationality, and economic status"

²⁸ Both the AAM and SAA emphasize diversity in both programming and employment.

²⁹ "AHS Downtown History and Mission of Institution," AHS Archives.

was a basic cause of loss of real estate values and blight.³⁰ It was believed that the department store was a key institution for drawing people downtown and provided a gathering place.³¹ However, the escalating civil rights violence increasingly portrayed downtown as a place where one might encounter confrontations and physical injury, even on a mere shopping excursion.³² Sit-ins at Atlanta department stores such as Rich's, and the accompanying boycotts, discouraged whites to venture downtown. As a result, downtowns in the 1960s became centers for business and entertainment and lost most of their traditional merchandising functions.³³ In a way, the AHS saw itself as a "retailer" of history. Originally located among downtown's shopping establishments, the society offered historical information to the white clientele. When white shoppers no longer ventured downtown, the AHS lost its primary audience. As a result, it relocated to Buckhead, where it could continue to serve its traditional audience.

The society's return downtown in the 1980s represented one way for institutions to be involved in urban renewal—it renovated pre-existing structures for new purposes. More often, however, cities cleared large tracts of land to build new structures. When attempts to use retail as a way to draw whites downtown failed, many supporters of urban renewal saw the demolition of close-in black neighborhoods, new highway construction, and drastic downtown rebuilding as ways to increase property values.³⁴ The Housing Act of

³⁰ Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 201.

³¹ Bernard J. Frieden and Lynne B. Sagalyn, *Downtown, Inc.: How America Rebuilds Cities* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), 7.

³² *Ibid.*, 211.

³³ *Ibid.*, 155.

³⁴ Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 207.

1949 offered federal help to cities for demolishing slum housing, no matter what they built in its place, on the assumption that tearing down slums was a community benefit in itself.³⁵ The poor and minorities were the leading victims of the highway and renewal programs. Through 1967, urban renewal dispossessed more than 400,000 families and federal aid urban highways some 330,000.³⁶

Although the AHS provided an example of urban renewal renovations, most of Atlanta's urban renewal followed the trend of clearing large areas for the purpose of large structures and highways. In Atlanta, urban renewal began in 1956 with Butler Street. Support for the urban renewal plan came from carefully negotiated behind-the-scenes discussions between the mayor, white business leadership, and leaders in the black community. Unofficial agreements encouraged blacks to move into west and southside areas of the city, thus keeping the northside reserved as an area for whites. Land cleared was used to build several hotels.³⁷ Through the "Forward Atlanta" campaign, Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr. sought to promote business activity in the city by promising to continue vigorous urban renewal efforts, including the building of a civic center and a stadium for major-league sports. The locations for these activities were in the urban renewal areas known as Buttermilk Bottom and Rawson-Washington.³⁸ Since these areas were adjacent

³⁵ Bernard J. Frieden and Lynne B. Sagalyn, *Downtown, Inc.*, 23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁷ Harvey K. Newman, *Southern Hospitality: Tourism and the Growth of Atlanta* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), 136.

³⁸ Transcript of Meeting of Board of Directors, August 18, 1965, AHS Archives. AHS board members were certainly aware of the newly re-zoned areas of Atlanta. During the 1965 AHS Board of Directors meeting that discussed the future of the AHS, Mr. Draper, in discussion about other available land, said, "you can get Buttermilk Bottom for free."

to the Butler Street area, which was the site of several new hotels, the proposed civic center would be near these tourism businesses.³⁹ As a result of the displacement of many of Atlanta's minorities from downtown, the AHS downtown did not provide programming to underserved Atlantans. Instead, it served tourists.

City Hall encouraged Atlantans to pursue projects that would attract tourists. Like many postindustrial cities, Atlanta sought to replace industry with culture. It was hoped that cultural institutions, like the AHS, would replace the revenue lost by the relocation of manufacturers.⁴⁰ Downtown developments such as Peachtree Center had an enormous impact on the development of Atlanta and its tourism business. Construction of the center directed growth away from the business district, where there was plenty of room to construct numerous hotels, which helped to transform the tourist business in Atlanta. The large number of hotel rooms could support large conferences and conventions.⁴¹ Because of this influx of tourists to the downtown area, tourist attractions needed to be available. It was such tourist attractions that AHS Downtown sought to take part.

The structures that emerged from Atlanta's urban renewal were businesses that appealed primarily to visitors. Mayor Andrew Young's pro-business and historic preservation-minded city hall continued the efforts of urban renewal initiated by Ivan Allen, Jr., two decades earlier. The 1980s saw the opening of the rapid transit rail system

³⁹ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁰ Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?*, 15. This change in some ways mimicked the New South initiatives more than fifty years earlier, which sought to replace plantations with industry.

⁴¹ Ibid, 175.

(MARTA) and numerous downtown hotels, corporate buildings, and housing units.⁴²

Mayor Young also combined his interest in downtown business and historic preservation to promote the re-opening of Underground Atlanta. Underground Atlanta had originally been developed as a part of the “Forward Atlanta” campaign to provide entertainment. Its restaurants, bars, and stores served tourists and downtown businesses. However, the attraction was short-lived. Underground Atlanta soon became a place for kitschy souvenir stands and drunken tourists. It fell into disarray; Mayor Young reinvigorated the project, continuing the trend of downtown development for tourism.⁴³

The success of Underground Atlanta provided a model for the AHS. It sought to combine entertainment and education. Free to the public, AHS Downtown hoped to offer exhibits, lectures, and audio-visual programs on Atlanta’s history and cultural and historic sites. It often depended on collaborations with nearby cultural institutions, such as the Fulton County Public Library and High Museum of Art, for programming. For example, with grant funding, a consortium of downtown institutions hosted a series of public discussions, entitled, “Key Decisions Shaping Atlanta: Scholars and Decision Makers Explore Atlanta’s Evolution.” Held at the library, topics included timely social subjects such as “The City Versus the Suburbs: Is Atlanta Losing its Heart?”; “Ralph McGill: The Conscience of the South”; and “Whose Life is it? Historical Perspectives on Women’s Rights and Abortion in Atlanta.” The society hoped that its downtown facility and diverse programming would attract those who lived and worked downtown, as well

⁴² Alton Hornsby, Jr. “Andrew Jackson Young: Mayor of Atlanta, 1982-1990” in *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 77 No. 3 (Summer, 1992): 159-182.

⁴³ Harvey K. Newman, *Southern Hospitality*, 178, 211-212. Developers hoped Underground Atlanta would resemble Baltimore’s Harborplace and St. Louis’s Gas Light District.

as provide a central gathering place for all Atlantans. However, few locals showed interest; the majority of visitors were tourists.⁴⁴

All financial support for AHS Downtown depended on grants and corporate sponsorship. The cost of renovating and maintaining the older structure proved to be a drain on finances. The downtown center was forced to close shortly before the 1996 Olympic Games, merging its resources with the museum located in Underground Atlanta.

As evidenced above, the AHS initially envisioned its role downtown as a place for both tourists and locals, focusing on a combination of entertainment and education. However, programming designed specifically for Atlantans failed to generate much interest; most participants were tourists. The changes that occurred at the AHS museum in Buckhead were influenced by the short-lived efforts at the downtown center. The programming developed at AHS Downtown catered to tourists rather than local residents. Such programming was incorporated into the Buckhead location's exhibits to both appeal to tourists and address twentieth century Atlanta history and contemporary issues.

Even when AHS activities returned to Buckhead, the urban renewal influence continued to be reflected through its collections and exhibits. The exhibits that developed to deal with the transformation of Atlanta in the last thirty years downplayed the displacement of minorities and focused on the progress brought on by the development of interstates and downtown structures.

Although the closing of AHS Downtown was discouraging for some, it also inspired the AHS to include more diverse programming in its newly built facilities. In the 1990's the society "rebranded" to the Atlanta History Center (AHC), constructed a museum, and

⁴⁴ A trend that continues today.

erected a permanent exhibit, narrating Atlanta's history from its inception to the present.⁴⁵ The rebranding of the AHS reflected a trend among other urban historical societies to change their images. Those involved in local historical societies became increasingly vocal about the benefits of interpreting history in a way that reflected the perspectives of the demographics of the community. As Barbara Franco, the executive director of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., writes, "Rather than viewing themselves as elite or scholarly experts who take responsibility for telling the community's history, historical societies increasingly see themselves as facilitators who are helping various communities within the city tell their stories."⁴⁶ Museum constituencies, influenced by the public debates over civil rights in the 1960s and 1970s, and by the culture wars in the 1980s and 1990s, claimed that they should take an active role in deciding how museums interpret individual and community experiences. By adding education and public service to the traditional activities of collecting and preservation, museums tried to extend this public outreach to audiences who felt excluded.⁴⁷ The culture wars politicized depictions of history and questioned traditional conceptions of identity and authority, and consequently advocacy became a new kind of authority. Curators were pressured to recognize the authority of their constituencies, who used these debates as platforms to comment on, and in some cases challenge, museum interpretations. Some museums invited community residents to assist with the planning and production of exhibitions and public programs. For example, in the 1990s, the

⁴⁵ Although the AHS rebranded to the AHC, it still retains the AHS as its official title.

⁴⁶ Sara Lawrence, "History of Historical Societies in the United States," Public History Resource Center <http://www.publichistory.org/features/HistoricalSocietyHistory.html> (accessed August 27, 2009).

⁴⁷ Catherine Lewis, *The Changing Face of Public History*, 5.

traditionally elite Chicago Historical Society collaborated with communities identified as underrepresented in presentations of city history. Society staff worked with community members to tell their story.⁴⁸ Although the project encountered several problems, the project showed how the community replaced the curator as the sole voice of authority. Collaboration became typical of historical society activities rather than the exception.⁴⁹ As will be illustrated later, the AHS often participated in collaborations in the 1990s and 2000s, but often with other institutions, rather than community residents. In this way, the AHS both participated in professional trends while retaining its traditional relationship with other cultural institutions.

The records of the extensive strategic planning process that preceded and accompanied the construction of the new museum building show the society's increased attention to reach out to underserved communities. Included in a long list of goals for the project was "to reach out to audiences, neighborhoods, and institutions not served through existing programs, to strengthen a sense of collective identity among Atlantans, as well as to welcome newcomers into our story."⁵⁰ Society staff wanted the new facilities and programs to be a "place where you belong," accessible, inclusive, multicultural, and an experience that provides a sense and pride of place.⁵¹ By adopting such ideas, the AHS served as an example to local institutions.

Despite the language used in the staff retreats, the permanent exhibits were designed for tourists rather than Atlantans. Exhibits present "sanitized" narratives that tend to

⁴⁸ Ibid, 100-120.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁰ "Goals," in AHS Strategic Planning September 1989, AHS Archives.

⁵¹ "Retreat Notes, February 1990," AHS Archives.

overlook conflict, particularly that which occurred during the twentieth century.

“Metropolitan Frontiers” provides an overview of Atlanta history appropriate for tourists that, while including minorities, fails to thoroughly address important events in the city’s history, such as the Civil Rights Movement. “Turning Point: The American Civil War,” fulfilled the society’s pledge to display former AHS Director Beverly DuBose’s extensive firearm and related paraphernalia collection. The exhibit examines the war in terms of broader themes so it is not limited to a region. Other permanent exhibits include “Centennial Olympic Games,” “Down the Fairway with Bobby Jones,” and “Shaping Traditions: Folk Arts in a Changing South.” These exhibits appeal to tourists because they address topics of regional interest. The inclusion of such exhibits also reflects a shift toward interpreting Atlanta as a region beyond city limits.⁵²

If the AHS had not been as invested in the city-wide effort to attract tourists, it may have been able to fully address the concerns for inclusivity and diversity discussed by staff during the strategic planning process. The AHS could participate in activities such as those pursued by the Chicago Historical Society to include local communities in the program and exhibit design process and could look to museum exhibits to study the conflict that has occurred throughout Atlanta’s history. By adopting a more sanitized presentation of Atlanta’s history, it reveals a clear distinction between the language used in AHS discussions and the reality of what the public experiences. It also suggests that there may be a sort of activist strain within the institution that must operate within the larger frame of the institution and its history. Ultimately, it is the institutional voice that is displayed to the public.

⁵² Rick Beard, “Outlook from the Director,” *Atlanta History Center News* Vol. 27 No. 4 (Fall 1996).

When determining new exhibit topics, AHS curators look to city-wide efforts that attract tourists. Two of Atlanta's key selling points in winning the Olympic Games were its claims as the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement and as the "city too busy to hate." In line with these tourist initiatives, the AHS sought to create both marketing tools for tourists, as well as exhibits that address topics in new ways. For example, "The Herndons: Style and Substance of the Black Upper Class in Atlanta, 1880-1930," marked a trend in increased exhibit inclusiveness, but also could be used to promote additional Civil Rights attractions.⁵³

As the AHS entered the new millennium, the society sought a wider variety of exhibitions that appealed to a greater, more diverse audience. To create such exhibits, curators depend on the archival collections to provide sources for text, as well as to serve as display objects. However, because the archives does not collect recent material, it does not have the resources to support such programs. To accommodate this, the AHS collaborates with not-for-profit organizations and academic institutions.

Two examples of this collaboration are "The Unspoken Past: Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History, 1940-1972," and "'I Have A Dream': The Morehouse Martin Luther King Jr. Collection." The 2005 "Unspoken Past" exhibit represented the culmination of a collaborative collecting project of the AHS and the Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History Thing, Inc. The non-profit identified lack of accessible documentation of the lives of LGBT men and women in Atlanta; the AHS assisted in the collection of oral histories that were used in the exhibit. Upon completion of the exhibition, the society placed the

⁵³ Ibid.

collection in the AHS archives.⁵⁴ While the society does not actively pursue collections that deal with more recent issues, it does not pass up the opportunity to house collections that do not fit in the collections of any other local repository.

The 2007 “I Have A Dream” exhibit represented the collaborative efforts of the AHS and several of Atlanta’s academic institutions. Archival staff worked with other repositories to collect civil rights documents to accompany Morehouse College’s recently acquired collection of Martin Luther King, Jr. personal papers. While the AHS donated items collected to Morehouse, such activities show how society archivists find ways to engage recent documents even if they are not housed in their collections.⁵⁵ Such collaborations between area archives also reveal that often archives collect items that are not already collected by other local repositories. Since the 1960s, the AHS archives may not have collected Civil Rights items because they are the focus of several local archives. Such collaborations also allow the AHS archives to occasionally move beyond its traditional role of collecting early white Atlanta history.

When the AHS cannot find a local organization to collaborate with, it relies on traveling exhibits. Exhibitions such as “Courage: The Vision to End Segregation, the Guts to Fight for It,” allow the AHS to present desired narratives on topics that are not served by the society’s archives or local institutions. This exhibition told the story of the citizens of Clarendon County, South Carolina, most of whom were outside the traditional

⁵⁴ Wesley Chenault, “The Unspoken Past: Atlanta Lesbian and Gay History,” from *Atlanta and Historians*, the 2007 supplement to the 121st Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2006/0612/07AMSupplement/07AMSup19.cfm> (accessed November 8, 2009).

⁵⁵ Morehouse College, “Collection Debuts for Icon’s Birthday: Atlanta History Center First to Host King Memorabilia,” Morehouse College <http://www.auctr.edu/libraryinfo/documents/King-Collection-AHC-Exhibition.pdf> (accessed November 9, 2009).

power structure and had no wealth or education. Through photographs, oral histories, and artifacts, the exhibit explored the grassroots community activism that this community initiated to begin the process that ended legal segregation in schools.⁵⁶

Despite increased visitation from the 1980s to the 1990s, the AHS continues to struggle to fully embrace museum and public concepts of diversity and inclusivity.⁵⁷ The Buckhead location is not visible, and the limited advertising budget cannot combat the stereotype the AHS has developed over the years. Nicknamed the “Buckhead Historical Society,” the AHS has a reputation as elitist, not open to the public, and not welcome to all ethnicities. Its archival collections have gaps in subjects such as recent political activities and ethnic collections—subjects that are of great interest to a large number of Atlantans. Society staff recognize that, despite great gains, the AHS finds it hard to lose its image.⁵⁸ Ultimately, the AHS is about, but not of, the community.

With the exception of special exhibitions, the typical AHS visitor resembles that of several decades ago.⁵⁹ The typical visitor is an older, white female, with higher levels of education and wealth. Membership mimics this typical visitor and most still come from the Buckhead area (81% of members live within a ten mile radius of the AHS). A study

⁵⁶ The Atlanta Dialogue, “Calendar of Events,” The Atlanta Dialogue http://www.theatlantadialogue.org/events/courage_the_vision_to_end_segregation_the_guts_to_fight_for_it (accessed November 8, 2009).

⁵⁷ AHS Board of Trustees, Strategic Planning Retreat Notes, April 27-28, 1996, AHS Archives. Total visitors in 1986 numbered 61,500. Total visitors numbered 162,000 in 1995. The increase can be credited to the opening of the new museum facility and its additional programming, as well as the re-naming of the facility as the Atlanta History Center (AHC).

⁵⁸ Strategic Planning S.W.O.T. (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis, January 1990, AHS Archives. Some staff members reported that the only way to combat such images is to physically move out of Buckhead.

⁵⁹ Exhibits like “I Have a Dream,” and “Courage,” draw the largest, most diverse audiences.

of visitors during 1995 reflects both the limited diversity, as well as its emphasis on serving local schools and tourists.⁶⁰

The development and expansion of the AHS museum in the 1980s and 1990s, illustrated the relationship between a cultural institution and the society in which it is located. During the 1960s, and most of the 1970s, the AHS continued the same activities it pursued since its inception in 1926. It responded to the Civil Rights Movement by embracing its traditional role. However, a need for funding and trends in social and public history instigated gradual changes. The activities at the AHS prior to the 1970s were greatly influenced by local and national events and issues. Beginning in the 1970s, the society began to be influenced by professional trends, as well. The issues that drove collecting policy, practice, and exhibition were urban renewal and tourism.

Although it appeared that the AHS moved beyond its traditional role by the 1990s, it still managed to retain traditional components. In fact, it accomplished this by participating in national trends in the respective museum professions. The professionalization of archives allowed the AHS archives to retain its traditional role while the professionalization of the museum allowed the society to further embrace diversity and outreach. In doing so, the AHS could now claim to serve a larger, more diverse audience.

⁶⁰ AHS Board of Trustees, Strategic Planning Retreat Notes, April 27-28, 1996, AHS Archives. 1996 Audience Visitor Demographics: 40% tourists; 60% Atlantans; 68% married; 20% male; 80% female; 92% white; 8% non-white; 6% high school graduate; 25% some college; 30% college graduate; 39% some graduate school and above; 14% age 18 and under; 12% age 19-34; 23% age 35-44; 24% age 45-54; 27% age 55+.

CHAPTER THREE

Museum and Archives

The AHS responded to the changing face of Atlanta and trends in public history by transitioning from primarily an archival repository to a museum with archives. This change did not occur quickly. The collections and exhibitions did not reflect or address the Civil Rights Movement; the AHS continued its traditional operations until the 1980s, when it turned its attention to expanding its audience beyond elite white Atlanta through more accessible exhibits and educational programming. In doing so, it reflected a shift within the broader efforts of museums to focus on public service and less on collections and interpretation. Museums were moving toward the notion of a forum where debate could take place, not merely a temple to house relics of the past. Museums could then participate in the changing society.¹

In this narrative of the AHS in transition, the institutional identity rooted in archives was overshadowed by the museum. The change almost seems immediate—upon the society's move to Buckhead, the interest in sharing its collections that had driven all programming seemed to come to a sudden halt. Yet, it continued to exist and serve a purpose. In reality, the archives continued to remain the focus until the 1980s.

¹ Duncan F. Cameron, "The Museum: A Temple or the Forum?" in *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 61-73.

Although the focus turned to the museum and its efforts to expand its audience, the archives, now located in the Kenan Research Center, underwent less obvious transformations. The archives successfully maintained its status by embracing professional standards and some archival trends and by operating within a larger institution. In doing so, the archives were able to remain focused on the scholar—one of the few elements of the AHS that remained constant from its founding in the 1920s to the present.

Like museums, archives developed professional standards in the 1970s and 1980s that greatly influenced the operations of the AHS. However, unlike museums, the professionalization of archives created a divide between archives and other public history professions, limiting those that could participate. Discussions about the interdisciplinary nature of museum work could not be applied to archives. However, the archival profession soon discovered that it would need to pursue outreach activities similar to those found in museums in order to attract users and justify continued funding. As archives pursued such activities, discussion about who actually used archives and issues such as activism and advocacy in archives needed to be addressed. The AHS archival staff certainly were not excluded from such discussions. Ultimately, the AHS archives chose to pursue professional activities that supported its vision as a facility primarily for the scholar.

When the AHS opened its new archival facility in 1976, it had the space to expand programming. While the AHS initially chose to keep the focus on its archival collection, the increased public programming provided an opportunity for the

development of a museum. Archives often exhibit parts of their collections by presenting them in similar ways as museum objects. As a result, it was easy to then include museum objects from the AHS collections. Both the museum and archives were influenced by trends in outreach in their respective professions. The AHS archives participated in limited outreach activities, while the museum, like many in the field, made outreach a priority.

As the AHS prepared to open its new archival facility in 1976, the society found it necessary to assess its priorities. After discussion, the trustees agreed that the society's emphasis was currently, and should continue to be, the collection of historical materials, designed primarily for service to the historical scholar, rather than the public. At this time, the society had not ventured into museum activities; the trustees enacted a strict policy as to limited museum-type functions of the society and continued to emphasize its policy of regular quarterly publications, with additional special publications.² By enacting such policies, the trustees ensured that the AHS archives retained its traditional role. The AHS staff, mostly archivists, certainly supported the trustees' decision to focus on the archives. In doing so, the board both showed a desire to retain its traditional role and captured the staff's sense of what defined the institution. This response to the staff reflected how the professionalization of museums and archives greatly influenced the activities of the AHS.

With such emphasis on its archival collections, and a belief that the beauty alone of the Swan House would attract enough visitors, the AHS was able to devote a majority of its resources to developing a professional archival facility. Because the majority of

² AHS Board of Trustees, "Minutes," March 3, 1969, AHS Archives.

activities continued to focus on the archival collections, it is reasonable to believe that, in addition to money from the McElreath Trust, funding from Fulton County was used to further develop the collections and facilities.³

The professionalization of the AHS archives secured the collections' status as a valuable Atlanta resource. From 1974 to 1984, AHS staff grew from five to twenty-five, a majority of which were library and archival staff.⁴ Many archival staff were recruited from the nearby Georgia State Archives. Because of this professional background, the AHS archivists were prepared to help the society's extensive collections encompass professional standards of collection care. Affiliations with organizations such as the Society of American Archivists, American Library Association, Society of Georgia Archivists, and the Georgia Library Association, ensured that the archivists were exposed to contemporary archival issues.⁵ Some issues were adopted; others were not.

Even though the initial focus remained on archives, the extra space available provided an opportunity for expanded programming. Members envisioned the facilities as adequate for regularly scheduled programs throughout the year, including lectures, films, and public activities that allowed the organization to carry out its "cultural responsibility

³ Contract between Fulton County and AHS, supporting "activities as outlined in organization's mission statement." 1972, AHS Archives. This shift from city to county support reflects the shift to Atlanta being defined as a region rather than just within city limits. By this time, a majority of white Atlantans moved from the city to surrounding counties

⁴ AHS Downtown Program Files, AHS Archives.

⁵ Atlanta History Center, "Kenan Research Center," Atlanta History Center <http://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/cms/About+Kenan+Research+Center/154.html> (accessed January 18, 2010).

to the community.”⁶ This was quite common among museums of this era. Outreach became an integral element in most museums’ operations.

This focus on serving the public encompasses most museum operations.⁷ The commitment to diversity has even affected the staffing of museums. The museum community now searches for professional staff beyond traditional academic disciplines if they do not “reflect diversity in cultural background, race or gender.”⁸ The AAM and International Council on Museums (ICOM) both require that those institutions affiliated with them commit to public outreach.⁹ The outreach activities conducted by the AHS steadily grew, enabling the museum to be accredited by the AAM in 1985.

While outreach became an integral element in museum operations, it did not initially become as important an element in archives. The activities at the AHS archives were no exception. Even though museums and archives quickly separated, the archival profession soon discovered it would need to pursue outreach activities similar to those found in museums. Unfortunately, this parting limited the resources archives had to pursue alternative activities. As John Grabowski writes: “It would seem that fragmenting the historical profession into obscure fields can serve only to counteract the

⁶ AHS, *Manual of Operations*, 1973, AHS Archives.

⁷ AAM, *Excellence and Equity*, 14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹ International Council on Museums, “ICOM Code of Ethics, 2006,” ICOM <http://icom.museum/ethics.html> (accessed February 21, 2010); American Association of Museums, “Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum,” AAM <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/upload/Characteristics%20of%20an%20Accreditable%20Museum%201-1-05.pdf> (accessed February 21, 2010). To become a member of ICOM, museums must agree to follow the Code of Ethics, which includes a commitment to “work in close collaboration with the communities from which their collections originates as well as those they serve.” AAM accredited museums identify the communities they serve and “make appropriate decisions in how to serve them.”

benefits of outreach, for it divides us from our allies, and more critically, may tend to isolate us intellectually from the public, who, in the United States, are the ultimate source of all that we might consider support.”¹⁰ Like museums, the archival profession continues extensive discussion of inclusivity and audience within the archival profession and at the national level. Although some archivists believe that the primary purpose of archives is to serve the needs of academic historians, the archival community has struggled with the question of what audience they desired to serve. Archivists initially began the discussion in the 1960s and 1970s as the emergence of social history encouraged archival materials that represented the activities of the underrepresented. However, the discussion surrounding such issues was primarily aimed at an academic audience. It was not until the 1980s that the archival community really began to debate its role in engaging the greater public. In the 1980s, archivists realized that the archival community had not yet seriously questioned how well it met the archival needs of society.¹¹ Some scholars encouraged collaboration between historians and archivists to work toward the identification, preservation, and management of the country’s documentary heritage, and to address contemporary issues and problems.¹² Despite the broad consensus on the need for greater outreach efforts, and the initial impetus following from the SAA’s 1983

¹⁰ John J. Grabowski, “Keepers, Users, and Funders,” 619.

¹¹ Larry J. Hackman, “A Perspective on American Archives,” in *The Public Historian* vol.8 no.3 (Summer 1986), 25.

¹² Richard J. Cox, “Archivists and Public Historians in the United States,” in *The Public Historian* vol.8 no.3 (Summer 1986), 29.

“Archives and Society” initiative, archivists have not found it easy to describe the essence of the archival function in society.¹³

Naturally, the difficulty with identifying an archives’ audience makes it difficult to determine universal standards for archival outreach. Some argue that many of the issues and problems surrounding the profession’s attitudes toward outreach are “deeply rooted in the attitudes and beliefs of our custodial heritage.”¹⁴ Many believe that the sole responsibility of the archivist is to collect and preserve documents. However, the ultimate goal should be use. Identification, acquisition, description, and all the rest are simply the means used to achieve this goal.¹⁵

Archivists have begun to provide outreach to nontraditional users—those not the administrator or “serious” researcher. Funding of archives frequently depends on increased use. Outreach programs introduce nontraditional users to the many uses of archives. The increased interest in genealogy provided an opportunity for archives to attract a wider audience. The archival literature of outreach repeatedly emphasizes that, even if archivists have no desire to expand constituencies, an enhanced public profile of archives lays the foundation for raising additional support for basic archival activities.¹⁶

¹³ Hackman, “A Perspective on American Archives,” 24.

¹⁴ Timothy L. Ericson, “Preoccupied with Our Own Gardens’: Outreach and Archivists” in *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), 116.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁶ James M. O’Toole and Richard J. Cox, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006), 129. Exhibitions of particularly valuable, intriguing, or important items from the collection; displays that commemorate significant events in personal, national, or organizational history; reproductions of items that will permit the wider community to remember and validate its own experience; popular publications highlighting the most important documents held by the archives and the services provided; newspaper columns and television productions that bring the past to life—these are all significant exhibits that archives can create.

Because the AHS archives operate within a larger organization, and that the primary focus is serving the serious researcher, the repository did not have to focus as much on changing activities for the sake of funding. As a result, AHS archival activities could remain focused on the researcher, with only occasional attempts at serving the non-traditional user.

Taking a cue from the museum profession, archivists have devoted increased attention to the importance of exhibits as a type of outreach program. Exhibiting archival treasures increases awareness of repository holdings.¹⁷ Some archival collections can even be presented like museum objects. Historical documents, as artifacts, engage the physical senses of sight, touch, and even occasionally hearing and smell. They can also evoke emotions created by “tangible links to the creator of the document.”¹⁸ Although the AHS archives failed to develop programming that used actual collections, its commitment to adopt new technologies allowed the user to interact with collections. Following an archival trend, the archives placed a majority of its celebrated photographic collection online so that even the remote user can engage the archival record.

In addition to exhibits, examples of outreach activities commonly used by archivists include publications, open houses, lectures, audiovisual presentations, instructional programs, and curricular materials.¹⁹ Archives Week, promoted by the SAA and state organizations, is designed to inform the public about archival activities. Yet

¹⁷ Ibid., 129.

¹⁸ Mary Jo Pugh, *Providing Reference Services for Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), 50.

¹⁹ William J. Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives* (Metuchen, NJ: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1992), 319-21.

such activities seem not to have moved the public to a general awareness of what archivists do.²⁰ Many relate archives to descriptors such as “musty,” “dusty,” and “staid.” The increased use of the term “archive” by computer specialists further causes confusion.²¹ Clearly, the archival profession has yet to succeed in dramatically increasing awareness of archives and their activities.

In most discussions, outreach is unique among the archival functions in that archivists invariably think about it only in terms of its individual components, such as publications, exhibits, or lectures. Outreach has become a series of projects with an identifiable beginning and end. In actuality, it should be ongoing.²² An important goal for outreach projects should be to demonstrate the importance of the archives’ unique mission, services, and holdings, and to emphasize that archival materials are crucial to the library’s own mission.²³ The AHS approached archival outreach through independent programs.

The outreach activities of the AHS archives are primarily limited to genealogical programming, providing researchers with information about archival holdings.²⁴ However, the genealogical resources the archives possess are those of Atlanta’s founding white families; they are only of interest to a very small percentage of visitors.

Genealogists are perhaps the largest user constituency in archives. In most cases, the

²⁰ Grabowski, “Keepers, Users, and Funders,” 620.

²¹ Mary Jo Pugh, *Providing Reference Services*, 9-10.

²² Timothy L. Ericson, “Preoccupied with Our Own Gardens,” 114.

²³ William J. Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives*, 318.

²⁴ Atlanta History Center, “Family Programs,” Atlanta History Center <http://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/cms/Family+Programs/63.html> (accessed January 18, 2010)

practice of genealogy has moved beyond its reputation as an activity associated only with elitist societies.²⁵ However, the AHS collection is an exception because of the origin of materials—the founding members of the society and their family and friends.

The effect of the AHS's expansion of programming in the late 1970s and early 1980s was two-fold. First, by using an archival facility as a place for a variety of programming not necessarily related to collections, the AHS was ahead of its time in its inclusion of activities that expand its audience beyond the traditional user. Secondly, this inclusion of additional activities marked a shift in the AHS's focus from its archival collections to the museum. As the AHS became increasingly interested in its museum in the 1980s, the archives were not involved in the change. Instead of building museum exhibits on the archival collections, or using archival collections to influence the acquisition of artifacts, the museum evolved almost entirely independently of its counterpart, allowing the archives to maintain its traditional audience and appeal to scholars. The AHS museum was greatly influenced by the changing ideas about museums and their functions within communities. Museums and archives had initially attracted people with similar backgrounds. However, the two soon pursued different paths as they developed separate professional standards. Following these trends, the AHS museum and archives ideologically grew apart.

By the late 1980s, the division between the AHS museum and archives was clear. This reflected the distinct separation of the professions that had occurred by this time. While the professionalization of museums focused less on collections and more on responding to the needs of the community, the primary focus of archives was the care of

²⁵ Mary Jo Pugh, *Providing Reference Services*, 58.

collections and increased integration of new technologies; evidence of this can be found in the objectives created in the Strategic Planning activities of the AHS in 1989.

Like other public history professions, the archival profession responded to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s by expanding its collections and activities. The social movements greatly influenced the history profession, which in turn influenced the archival profession. Many professionals, surrounded by the issues of racism, war, sexism, and class bias, felt that their academic work alienated them from interacting with the public. They also felt a need to make history relevant. Historians' actions ultimately dictated new directions for archives.²⁶ Social movements also encouraged historians to study "from the bottom-up." Because of this, they needed archival repositories that collected documents related to those groups being studied—groups that previously had been neglected.

Studying history from the bottom up also often involved the use of less traditional sources, which were often not found in archives. As a result, some collecting efforts responded to these changes. Some repositories responded by working closely with public historians and community groups. In response to the women's liberation movement, the Lesbian Herstory Archives were founded in 1974 in New York City. As a grassroots archives, members sought to collect the stories they felt were previously overlooked by "patriarchal historians." Herstory engaged community members by using the archival collections to create presentations (often as a slideshow) for various community groups.²⁷

²⁶ Ronald J. Grele, "Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?" in *The Public Historian* Vol. 1 no. 1 (1981), 44.

²⁷ The Lesbian Herstory Archives, "A Brief History," The Lesbian Herstory Archives <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history.html> (accessed 11/10/2009). Archival collections include

The Conservation Library in Denver, Colorado, changed its collecting activities as the environmental movement changed its focus. From 1960 to 1975, it transitioned from “a shrine to Progressive conservation to a repository for alternative technology information.” The staff underwent monumental changes as well. They fully embraced new information technologies and became leaders of local environmental organizations. These changes mirrored the shift in environmental activism away from “the wilderness – versus-civilization trope and toward a more direct engagement with the complex social issues of the era and an acceptance of the obvious connections between environmental degradation and human social problems.”²⁸

However, most archival repositories, including the AHS, did not change in response to contemporary social movements. However, this time did bring a greater sense of continuity among the archival profession. Like many repositories, the AHS archival staff devoted itself to preservation, cataloging, relating material, and making information available for historical research.

The professionalism of the AHS archivists that allowed for them to establish an exemplary facility and collections also limited their development in a way. The professionalization of archives necessitated that archivists be trained in a specific skill set. Unlike museums, which were becoming increasingly interdisciplinary at this time, the archival profession became more limited in scope.

“books, magazine, journals, news clippings (from establishment, Feminist or lesbian media), bibliographies, photos, historical information, tapes, films, diaries, oral histories, poetry and prose, biographies, autobiographies, notices of events, posters, graphics and other memorabilia.”

²⁸ Andrew Glenn Kirk, *Collecting Nature: The Environmental Movement and the Conservation Library* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), ix.

Since the 1960s, American museums underwent sizeable changes. They transformed from institutions in which they served as an authority that would elevate the knowledge and taste-level of the visitor. In response to trends in social history, the “museum’s role transformed from one of mastery to one of service.”²⁹ This reflected a broader trend toward more “democratic” institutions that entailed a movement from elite control to larger scale mass involvement.

Where once curatorial and collections-related departments once dominated museum operations, education and public programs have become integral components.³⁰ Museums often develop educational programming around collections, while archival education programs often exist to increase participants’ understanding of what archives are (Archives Week). In addition, museum educational programs are designed for a variety of ages; archival education programs tend to be limited to adults. Both museums and archives often use public programming to address topics that are not necessarily affiliated with collections. At the AHS, the education department plays a significant role in society operations. Educational opportunities have been created to encompass a fairly large audience, including curriculum resources and guided tours for school groups, monthly programming and summer camps for children, and living history programs, lecture series, workshops, and festivals for families.³¹

²⁹ Stephen E. Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution, 2002).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

³¹ Atlanta History Center, “Education,” Atlanta History Center <http://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/cms/Education/8.html> (accessed January 18, 2010)

With such changes, the museum soon became a difficult term to define because it no longer served just one role.³² The American Association of Museums (AAM) acknowledges this, but states that their common denominator of all museums is a “unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things of this world.”³³ An organization must still be collection-based, but the focus is now on public service. The museum profession agreed that educational and public programming is integral to institutions.³⁴ Archives do not necessarily fit into this model. Because the Society of American Archivists (SAA) includes both public and private repositories in its membership, public service is not necessarily intrinsic in an archives’ being.³⁵

Several factors influenced this change in focus from collections to public service. Beginning in the 1960s, museum professionals discovered that growing collections created an “enormous economic burden” on institutions as many collected indiscriminately. For both AHS museum and archival collections, members determined what was collected based on their personal interests and preferences. This created numerous gaps in the collections. New laws also made it difficult to acquire foreign

³² Theodore Low, “What is a Museum?” in *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 31.

³³ American Association of Museums, “What it a Museum?” American Association of Museums <http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/whatis.cfm> (accessed January 18, 2010).

³⁴ AAM, “What is a Museum?”; The International Council of Museums, “ICOM Mission,” <http://icom.museum/mission.html> (accessed January 25, 2010); Elaine Heumann Gurian, “What is the Object of this Exercise? A Meandering Exploration of the Many Meanings of Objects in Museums,” in *Daedalus* 128.3 (Summer 1999): p.163; Stephen Weil, “From Being About Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum,” in *Daedalus* 128.3 (Summer 1999):229.

³⁵ Society of American Archivists, “Overview of the Profession,” Society of American Archivists <http://www.archivists.org/profession/overview.asp> (accessed January 24, 2010).

objects. Most importantly, it was the change in focus from “an inward concentration on their collections to a newly articulated outward concentration on the various publics and communities served.”³⁶

Today, museums can no longer exist only to serve an elite audience. All museums are public institutions. Even if they are private organizations, they depend on some sort of public support, whether it be from donors or local, state, or federal governments. For example, as previously discussed, the AHS received support from the city and county governments until the 1960s. The society continues to receive local government support in the form of funding of specific programs.³⁷ Not-for-profit tax incentives offer additional motivation for the AHS to appeal to the public.

Because of limited resources, every museum is competing for visitors.³⁸ This being so, each must determine which “niche” they will attract, while trying to attract the largest audience as possible.³⁹ This change in approach occurred as museums strove to attract an audience that reflects the diversity of society. Many museum professionals hope that in addition to reflecting the diversity of a community, museums can also create a sense of inclusion that may be lacking in society.⁴⁰

³⁶ Weil, *Making Museums Matter*.

³⁷ Atlanta Historical Society, “Programs” Atlanta Historical Society <http://www.atlantahistorycenter.com.cms/Programs+/276.html> (accessed January 18, 2010). For example, the AHS currently receives support from the Fulton County Board of Commissioners for “Everyday History.”

³⁸ John H. Falk, *Identity and the Museum Experience* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009), 21.

³⁹ Theodore Low, “What is a Museum?” 39.

⁴⁰ American Association of Museums, *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1992), 15.

As museums underwent substantial changes in the 1980s, discussion occurred between the archival and museum professions. The changes in museums beyond collections resulted in the addition of a variety of backgrounds, such as education, public relations, and visitor services. One reason many struggled was the specific skill set needed by archivists that cannot be obtained from other public history professions.

Despite differences in professional standards, numerous similarities exist between museums and archives. Both provide information to users, and both can be categorized as public history because they allow users to engage with history. These similarities offered the potential for both to follow similar paths. Discussions in public history and archival journals during the 1980s show that many struggled with how to address both occupations. In the end, archives and museums parted ways, developing into autonomous entities. Museums continued to move from collection-driven activities to a broader interpretation, focusing on the needs and wants of the visitor.⁴¹ Because collections remained the focus of archival activities, the profession was hesitant to commit to such drastic changes.

The division of the AHS museum and archives, and their affiliation with their respective professional organizations (AAM and SAA), influenced the direction each entity followed. The AAM accreditation process is extensive and involves “buy in” from all departments. Not every applicant necessarily is accepted. To even begin the year-long process, applicants must first meet eligibility and readiness requirements. The process involves self-evaluations, site visits, and accreditation committee review

⁴¹ Gail Anderson, “Reinventing the Museum,” in *Museum Mission Statements: Building a Distinct Identity*, ed. Gail Anderson (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1998).

sessions; in all processes, the applicant must include a significant investment of time and resources from “all departments and level of the institution’s staff and leadership,” and requires an ongoing commitment to change.⁴²

Because of such accreditation guidelines, as the AHS went through the application process all aspects of the organization needed to be involved and needed to be aware of changes that could be made to increase educational activities and expand programming to a more diverse audience. The AHS needed to assess both its museum and archival collections and find ways to fill gaps in both collections and programming. Where it saw gaps in collections, the AHS either obtained objects or developed educational programming to present material. The AHS also solved this problem by participating in collaboration exhibitions and hosting numerous travelling exhibits.

The professional arm of archives, on the other hand, does not expect its members to follow such rigid structures. Unlike AAM, SAA members do not go through an application process. Archival repositories need only be “responsible for or substantially interested in the custody, study, teaching, control, or use of records, archives, and/or private papers.”⁴³ To become members, institutions do not have to show evidence of outreach and diverse programming.

The commitment to emphasize the AHS archives as a scholarly resource began in the late 1980s, as the society as a whole was determining its future direction. Even before the new museum facility was erected, leaving the archives to develop separately,

⁴² American Association of Museums, “About Preparation and Application,” American Association of Museums <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/apply.cfm> (accessed January 25, 2010)

⁴³ Society of American Archivists, “Benefits of Membership,” Society of American Archivists <http://www.archivists.org/membership/benefits.asp> (accessed January 25, 2010)

the focus was to make collections more accessible through new technology.⁴⁴ This interest in obtaining new technologies aligned with the focus of the archival profession in the 1990s to develop computer applications that made archival collections more accessible.

The AHS archives chose objectives that reinforced its traditional role as a resource for serious researchers. The first objective was “to increase our research potential profile with the academic and scholarly community.” The archivists hoped to achieve this by involving representatives from the academic and scholarly communities, and by creating internships, contacting media to write articles on specific locations, and to improve reference services through more efficient access to a greater number of collections.⁴⁵

The second objective the archival staff chose to pursue was “to increase the quality and quantity of collection development in the library/archives.” To accomplish this, they intended to use the assessment methodologies recommended by the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN). Staff hoped that by completing the lengthy assessment, the facility would then be able to develop a collection development policy, a budgetary basis for acquisition funds, and a profile of the AHS collections with regard to existing collections, current collecting intensity, and future collecting intensity.⁴⁶ A concern with such activities revealed that the archives desired to remain a professional

⁴⁴ “AHS Strategic Planning,” September 1989, AHS Archives.

⁴⁵ “Strategic Plan,” 1989, AHS Archives.

⁴⁶ “Library/Archives,” March 21, 1990, AHS Archives. The process would be a long one; a formal collections management policy was not completed until 2008.

facility that met widely-accepted standards. In addition, by conducting activities developed by the RLIN, this may have been a way for the archives to move toward making their collections information widely available through mediums such as the Union Catalog (created by the Research Libraries Group, who developed the RLIN). Such activities also show that the archives was concerned about justifying continued financial support (budgetary basis for acquisitions funds). The archivists were very interested in expanding collections; within the next several years the facility accessioned approximately 5000 new volumes, 300 new manuscript collections, and 150 new visual arts collections.⁴⁷

By setting objectives that focused on better management of collections, the facility developed into one that has limited opportunities to attract additional audiences. Renovations of the Kenan Research Center (when the new museum facility was built) allowed for the archival facilities to further meet professional standards. However, the physical separation of the museum and archives resulted in decreased visibility of the facility. While the collections are open to the public, limited advertising means that only those interested in research on a specific topic will seek the collections. Visitors to the museum are not encouraged to visit the archives; this portion of the organization almost seems invisible.

In the archival community, the incentive for increased archival use is increased funding, or even just staying open. However, because the AHS archives are part of a larger organization, and has a dedicated clientele (however limited in scope), this is not of great concern. Consequently, there is little need for programming that expands to a

⁴⁷ "AAM Reaccreditation," 1995, AHS Archives.

variety of users. In addition, internally, the museum is viewed as the primary funding source. As such, the archives can serve as a preserver of “tradition.”

Because the archives cater to a specific user, certain standards of archival management were overlooked until recently. The archives’ lack of interest in meeting the needs of the visitor is apparent in the lack of a collections policy or visitor profile. It was not until June 2008 that the archives established a formal collections management policy outlining the scope of collections. In this document, the traditional collections of nineteenth century Atlanta, the Civil War, and Atlanta’s white elite are reinforced.⁴⁸

Archival facilities typically conduct entrance interviews of archival visitors. These entrance interviews offer a valuable reference for archivists to identify their audience and better meet their needs. Common information collected includes purpose of visit, collections of interest, and home institution. In the process, users can help to identify what records need to be collected.⁴⁹ In this activity, there is an important parallel to museums that have sought community and audience participation, not just in feedback, but also in activities such as exhibit design and collections policies. Such activities are intended to make institutions more democratic and move away from elite origins to being an institution of the people. However, archives may face a particular conundrum in this arena, and may often position themselves as defending a particular notion of professionalization. In the case of the AHS, this sharing of authority further illustrates the separate objectives of the archives and museum.

⁴⁸ *AHS Collections Management Policy*, 2008.

⁴⁹ Mary Jo Pugh, *Providing Reference Services*, 29.

The entrance interview also allows archivists to identify the needs of users; if this is not done, users will not seek out archives.⁵⁰ However, at the AHS, most users are those that visit because they have already sought out specific collections; the facility rarely gets the visitor that “wanders in.” The AHS did not begin to utilize entrance interviews until 2008, when the practice began at the same time the collections policy was adopted.

The commitment to serve researchers also had an effect on the administrative function of the archives.⁵¹ In addition to not serving the general public, the AHS archives serve a limited administrative role. Typically, an organization’s archives process and house administrative records that can be used by staff to perform a number of activities (research, strategic planning, commemoration of anniversaries and events, public relations, etc.). While the AHS archives do have hundreds of administrative collections in its possession, none are processed; it is nearly impossible to find specific items.⁵² Although the failure to process administrative records may just be due to a lack of resources, it may also reveal how the archivists view the role of the AHS in the history of Atlanta. They may not view the institution as a player in the historical narrative. However, as previously illustrated, the history of the AHS is influenced by events in Atlanta, and the society’s activities often reflect the priorities of the city government.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁵¹ One of the primary roles of an archival facility is to serve an administrative role for the host institution.

⁵² The author has experienced this problem while conducting research for the project. The AHS archives houses hundreds of boxes of unprocessed administrative material. Until processed, there is no way to know what is in the collection.

Although the AHS museum and archives grew apart physically and ideologically, both can work together to show that the institution as a whole serves a wider variety of visitor, including the general public (museum) and the scholar (archives). Such collaborations are useful when justifying continued funding and acknowledgement in professional communities. Examples of this can be found in numerous AHS collaborative programs and the 1995 application for AAM reaccreditation.

In order to serve increasingly more diverse audiences, many organizations have discovered that they may not have all needed resources “in-house.” Museums must now engage in active, ongoing collaborative efforts with a wide spectrum of organizations and individuals who can contribute to the expansion of the museum’s public dimension.⁵³ As previously discussed, the AHS fills the gaps in its collections (post-1950s Atlanta) with travelling exhibits and collaborations with local organizations. For such collaborations to be successful, it is necessary that the museum and archives work together.

After twenty years of sharing space with museum exhibits, the Kenan Research Center chose to return to its “roots” and embrace its reputation as a resource primarily for the scholarly researcher. Even after the new museum building was completed in 1994, the role of the archives in the context of the larger institution was addressed. The primary needs of the library and archives continued to be identified as improved access to holdings and more sophisticated networks that connect AHS holdings to other research resources. In addition, clearly influenced by the direction of the museum, staff desired to create educational programming that addressed broader aspects of history (not just those

⁵³ Ibid., 19.

limited to Atlanta), in an attempt to attract a tourist faction to the archival facilities.⁵⁴

This showed how the emphasis on serving the tourist influenced even the archives and its commitment to its traditional role. The archival profession struggled with how to expand their audience and provide programming in addition to basic archival activities. In doing so, it encountered a unique set of challenges. Archives could no longer remain solely resources for “serious” researchers.

The AHS archives focused on professional archival elements of collections management instead of elements such as outreach. It integrated minor examples of other contemporary archival issues such as advocacy and activism so it could present itself as a repository interested in serving the same diverse audience as the museum, an important detail when pursuing funding and accreditation. Portions of the society’s 1995 AAM Reaccreditation Survey shows that the archives needed to highlight certain activities, even if in actuality they were not the primary focus. The AHS archival collections reported: 1425 manuscript collections, 1.5 million photos and negatives, 100,000 architectural drawings, 5,000 maps, 6,000 cartoons, 1,000 posters, 2,000 prints, 5,000 postcards, 875 films, and 525 videos. This allowed the archives to emphasize its sizeable collection.⁵⁵

The application also indicates that the archives consciously makes an attempt to include items that have not previously been collected. However, instead of collecting items that expanded the demographic diversity, it obtained collections that reflected the

⁵⁴Strategic Planning Task Force Notes, November 2, 1995, AHS Archives. Archival staff discussed developing a lecture series about topics related to archival collections that discussed regional, rather than Atlanta, history.

⁵⁵ AHS, “AAM Reaccreditation,” 1995, AHS.

experience of primarily white Atlantans, including Central Atlanta Progress (a private not-for-profit community organization created by business leaders to promote the development of downtown Atlanta), the Woodruff Arts Center, the architectural drawings of Roy Ashley and Associates, and the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) Revolutionary War Collection and Genealogical Library.⁵⁶

The archives continued to emphasize minor collections as examples of inclusivity beyond reaccreditation periods. The oral histories of gay and lesbian Atlantans, collected for a museum exhibit in 2006, became a way for the archives to show that it is committed to expanding its collections. Just as the archives' limited use of outreach programming through genealogical activities, emphasizing a collection that reflects the renewed emphasis on activism in archives in the twenty-first century. Like some museum professionals and historians, who view museums as places for the discussion of larger social issues, archivists began to examine why it is important for archivists to understand their role in social issues. Randall Jimerson, an archivist that has led the recent movement to increase activism in archives, writes that the archivist is "no longer regarded as the neutral guardian of historical source materials, but as active agents in the process of shaping our knowledge of the past." Archivists can use archives to make society more knowledgeable, tolerant, diverse, and more just.⁵⁷ Archivists like Jimerson argue that advocacy and activism can address social issues without abandoning professional standards of fairness, honesty, detachment, and transparency.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ AHS, "AAM Reaccreditation," 1995, AHS.

⁵⁷ Randal C. Jimerson, *Archives Power*, 190.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

Although the story of the AHS archives may not be as exciting and dramatic as the museum's transition from private club to accredited facility, it is no less revealing about the nature of archives and the archival profession. Even the most traditional archival facilities are often influenced by trends in the profession. The AHS archive was able to continue to focus on the scholar by embracing professional trends such as increased technology, with the goal of better managing collections so they can be made available.

The story of the AHS archives also shows that the professionalization of the museum and archival professions caused each to develop in different ways—museums moved away from a focus on collections, while the nature of archival work kept the professional focus on the collection and the traditional role of the society. The strong influence of professional trends reiterates how the AHS responded to influences beyond Atlanta after the 1960s. It also shows that the AHS trustees allowed the staff to influence many of the changes that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. In their professional capacity, staff increasingly paid attention to the needs of its audience. In doing so, programming is no longer driven by the institution, it is driven by the user.

CONCLUSION

Cultural institutions like the AHS do not operate within a vacuum; they participate in a reciprocal relationship with the society in which they are located. Over the course of the AHS's history, its programming and exhibits reflected the elite white Atlantans that comprised the city government through the 1960s, then participated in the city's emphasis on urban renewal and tourism. In addition to being influenced by the society in which it is located, the AHS has been greatly influenced by the professionalization of the museum and archives. In many ways, the professionalization of the AHS prompted the transformation of the AHS from an elite club to an organization for the larger community. The professionalization of the archives allowed the AHS to maintain its traditional role because professional standards emphasize collection management rather than outreach. The professionalization of the museum encouraged the adoption of more diverse activities geared toward more diverse audiences, as well as a move toward less object-centric exhibits and educational programming.

To truly understand the AHS's place in twenty-first century Atlanta, one must look to its history. In doing so, it is possible to see how the AHS continues to struggle with many of the issues it faced in years past. It also illustrates how such institutions continue to face the consequences of decisions made by the organization decades ago.

The August 1965 discussion about the future of the AHS showed a division among board members over issues such as inclusion and diversity. Some members

desired that the AHS retain its traditional roles, while others saw an opportunity to change with the changing face of Atlanta. Although the institution chose to maintain its traditional role, it was forced to identify its audience, mission, and community served. Such discussions have since become a routine evaluation tool. Although the AHS sometimes chose to maintain its traditional role, such activities do reveal that cultural institutions are constantly influenced by the society in which they operate.

The period 1966-1976 has had long-lasting consequences for the AHS. Because it passed up the opportunity to collect the archival records of the Civil Rights Movement and a changing Atlanta, it lacks a strong collection of a time period that is very important to many Atlantans. When it passed up such an opportunity, it allowed other Atlanta institutions to collect such material. Archival repositories are often territorial after establishing their “collecting niche.” Often, they are wary of sharing material, or allowing other repositories to establish similar collections (because they will be competing for users and funding). In the case of the AHS, it is likely that the society has experienced difficulty in obtaining material for more contemporary exhibits and programming because other area repositories are unwilling to partner.

Archival professionals must understand that that such territorial issues are a part of the job, and that, often, archivists must work within their “collecting niche.” In addition, both archival and museum professionals should realize that often the reality of the situation differs from the desires of staff and constituents. As evidenced by the AHS, staff have shown a desire to change in response to a changing Atlanta and professional initiatives. However, they often discover that it is difficult to make changes in an institution restrained by limited funding, institutional priorities, and set ways. Despite

such difficulties, it is important for professionals to understand the history of their institution and its external influences to see how their work draws from, and contributes to, larger society.

Scholars will find that such a study of the AHS moves beyond traditional institutional histories to address larger society. While recent institutional studies show how public history has greatly influenced cultural institutions, none explicitly address the relationship between the institution and society. In addition, archival institutions, especially those that operate within a larger organization, have been left out of such studies. However, like museums, archives are certainly influenced by the society in which they are located.

New approaches to the study of cultural institutions can also help to link historical literature with that of public history and archives. As illustrated, historical societies and other organizations do not operate within a vacuum. They constantly change, influenced by events in the communities in which they are located, as well as national events and professional trends. As a result, the traditional study of historical societies as institutional histories will no longer suffice. Further studies must be conducted that examine the reciprocal relationship between cultural institution and society, and the role of the institution in the urban landscape.

Atlanta is a city that is constantly looking ahead. After rising like a phoenix from the destruction of the Civil War and being the quintessential New South City, Atlanta claimed to be the “city too busy to hate,” and then the “new international city.” Atlantans look to the future and foresee progress. The AHS should do the same. Change has come slowly to the AHS. Since its inception in 1926, the society has followed the same path as

many urban American historical societies—from elitist club to institution open to all. It cannot be expected that the AHS fix its problems in only a few years. However, if the AHS continues to follow the path it has followed for more than eighty years, it will continue to reassess its audience and adapt its programming to professional trends. In doing so, the institution will continue its role as an arbiter of tradition and change in an urban landscape.

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