

# Advocacy

## A D V O C A C Y

by Anna M. Aschkenes\*

### Question:

What is the best time of the year to make your “case” for history funding?

### Answer:

When there is not a budget at issue, when new legislators have been elected. It is better to advocate for New Jersey history when the “life” of the community is not at stake. Between October and February legislators have more time for one-on-one meetings and have the ability to free-up time of their key aides to meet with you. Further, newly elected legislators should be educated about the good work you do and how they can help. Seven key points to remember:

1. Legislators whether new or senior members of the New Jersey House or Senate, do not necessarily know the historic sites in their district. It is up to you to educate them and to maintain a presence.
2. Numbers count, be sure to advise your legislator how many people attend your site and what towns in their district are represented among your visitors.
3. Historical sites are anchors in each community in which they are found. They represent the past but more importantly—the present—as you help educate the community and maintain the historic fabric of your town.
4. Local historic sites are cost effective. Often schools can walk to a local site, eliminating the need for buses which are difficult to schedule and finance. If schools do transport their students via a bus, the trip is short, permitting the busses to return to the schools in a reasonable amount of time, therefore, making them available for their regularly scheduled rounds.
5. Text books are written so as to be viable for sale in all 50 states. As a result, there is no concentration on New Jersey history. Local historic sites are key, therefore, to the telling of New Jersey history.
6. When speaking to decision-makers, stress the fact that young people learn in differing ways. Many kids responds to visuals, touch and interactive learning - all of which can be done well by local historic sites. Do you offer these types of learning experiences?
7. Reassess the story / narrative you tell to the public. Do you incorporate women, diverse populations and class structure into the history of your local historic site?

You will accomplish a great deal if, during this non-budgetary period, you reach out and meet with a legislator. Don't call on elected officials only when you want something!



**Anna M. Aschkenes** is Executive Director for Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission and responsible for two museums—East Jersey Olde Towne Village and the Cornelius Low House / Middlesex County Museum