



GREATER PHILADELPHIA AREA DOCENT CONSORTIUM

GPADC Fall Meeting
Carpenters' Hall, Philadelphia
27 September 2021

Welcome

GPADC Opening Remarks. GPADC Chair Anna Hadgis welcomed all participants to the GPADC Fall Meeting, presented in conjunction with Carpenters' Hall, Philadelphia. She asked that we have a moment of silence to remember all those who were not with us.

Anna began by noting that we are members of the historic "B.C." generation, that is, Before Covid. We remember what working and socializing used to be like in the days before the pandemic. She also noted how we have pivoted during these trying times, using our creativity to adapt to changed circumstances. We should applaud ourselves. She noted that although she misses the sound of many school groups filling the Penn Museum, she is glad to be back doing small tours for children and adults.

Anna expressed her gratitude to our host and speaker, Alex Palma, Assistant Director of Carpenters' Hall. Alex also has worked as a docent so he understands our challenges.

Program

Alex Palma, Assistant Director, Carpenters' Hall, Philadelphia. Alex welcomed everyone and noted that he had arranged a display of tools on the second floor for us. He found by a show of hands that this was a first time visit for approximately two-thirds of our group. Alex presented a brief history of the site before sharing some strategies for dealing with difficult guests.

History of Carpenters' Hall. The Carpenters' Company was founded in 1724. They were descended from a London group, the Worshipful Company of Carpenters, a medieval guild that dates back to at least 1380. When William Penn established Philadelphia in 1682, he invited carpenters from this London guild to come to Pennsylvania and participate in building the colony.

The Carpenters' Company functioned as a mutual aid organization and a regulatory body. They had the power to establish building codes, design aesthetics and set wages. In 1770 they began building Carpenters' Hall to serve as their meeting place in Philadelphia. The building was completed in 1774. The Carpenters' Company built many famous Philadelphia landmarks including City Tavern, the Benjamin Franklin House, Independence Hall, the Old Pine Street Church, the original St. Joseph's church and the steeple of Christ Church.

In 1774, 12 of the original 13 colonies sent delegates to Philadelphia for the 1st Continental Congress in response to the problems Massachusetts had recently had with the British Crown.

They chose Philadelphia because of its central location among the colonies and also for its religious tolerance.

The delegates needed a private space large enough to accommodate them where they could freely discuss their issues and grievances. Some loyalists among the delegates wanted to hold the Congress at Independence Hall, at that time the seat of the government in Pennsylvania as they believed it would tone down opposition to the Crown. But the delegates chose to meet at Carpenters' Hall. It provided a space where they could speak freely. Benjamin Franklin's Library Company was located on its second floor, an added benefit as delegates could consult the holdings for precedents on legal matters and policies.

The results of the 1st Continental Congress included a boycott of British goods that began in December 1774. More importantly, they created Articles of Association, an agreement to work together. The delegates were articulating a new sense of specifically American identity. As one of the delegates, Patrick Henry, put it: "I am not a Virginian . . . I am an American. . . We are Americans." Ultimately, this Continental Congress set the stage for war. The documents that were signed here meant that all the colonies rallied when fighting broke out in Concord in 1775.

Over the years, Carpenters' Hall was used by many organizations and institutions, including the 1st National Bank, the Bricklayers Company, the Library Company, and the Philosophical Society. Alex regaled us with two of the more dramatic incidents in the history of Carpenters' Hall. It was the site of The Bonvouloir Affair and the first bank robbery in American history.

In December 1775, Benjamin Franklin and John Jay met secretly with Julien de Bonvouloir, a French envoy, to discuss the colonists' plans and philosophies. As a result, the French government agreed to sell gunpowder to the colonies and give them access to a French port. This contributed to America's success in the Revolutionary War.

The Bank of Pennsylvania rented Carpenters' Hall from 1797 through 1799. In 1798, the bank was robbed of \$100,000 and Patrick Lyon, a blacksmith who had worked on the vault, was accused, convicted and imprisoned for the crime. Eventually it was discovered that a bank employee and a member of the Carpenters' Company had committed the crime and deliberately made Lyon their scapegoat. Lyon was released and eventually sued the Bank, winning more money than he had supposedly stolen. In the famous John Neagle painting *Pat Lyon at the Forge*, Lyon is shown in his shop while the view from the window behind him shows the Walnut Street Jail in which he had been unfairly imprisoned.

Interpretation in the Time of COVID. Alex described some of the issues that Carpenters' Hall encountered during the pandemic: closures, the loss of many volunteers, the loss of revenue due to the inability to rent the space for events, and the need to switch to virtual programs. A side effect was a rise in disgruntled visitors. Alex shared some of his tips for handling difficult visitors calmly and respectfully.

- Stop, breathe and look calmly and steadily at the upset individual. Sometimes people just need to be heard.
- Deliver a calm verbal warning such as “Excuse me, please stop . . .” Never raise your voice, argue or debate the issue. The goal is to avoid escalating the situation.
- Ask the individual to step outside or into another space as changing the location can help. However, avoid being alone with the individual. It is useful to have a witness and will help to prevent an altercation. Prioritize your own safety and that of others.
- If all else fails, ask for help from a colleague, security, or the police.
- Try to give the irate individual a way out of the situation in a way that will allow them to save face.
- Always tell your boss after the incident.
- Alex was asked about TACT2 and explained that it was a program used by mental health professionals in extreme situations. He does not know if security personnel are routinely trained in this.

Alex concluded by briefly noting a few of the upcoming events at Carpenters’ Hall. See their website for details.

GPADC Business

GPADC Steering Committee. Anna introduced past GPADC Chairs Barbara Moll, Bonnie Brown, Ellen Semple and Janet Krevenas as well as the current Steering Committee members: Vice Chair Maria Colella, Treasurer Judy Zipkin-Grasso, Secretary Rebecca Butterfield, and Members-at Large VJ Jackson, Michael Rieder, Bill Linhart and Linda Markoff.

Round Table Discussions and Workshop. Working in small groups, participants were asked to discuss the following questions and any others that were of particular interest to them:

- Can you think of a time where a guest/tourist/attendee at a site you were working at was agitated and escalating a situation? How did the situation resolve? What could have been done better?
- What can museums/historic sites/cultural sites do to support docents in situations like these?
- In what situation would the techniques mentioned in this presentation NOT work?

Representatives of each group presented their findings:

- Docents must be sensitive to gender and ethnic identity and to be aware of the appropriate language to use. Training in DEAI is extremely valuable and many institutions are providing more of this to all staff.
- Several groups stressed the importance of clearly defined policies and procedures regarding COVID protocols. Institutional signage, such as “According to CDC recommendations . . .” would be very helpful in enforcing mask mandates or social distancing.

- Larger institutions with trained guards have more resources than smaller ones.
- A calm demeanor and good listening skills are always helpful. For example, “Thank you for wearing a mask” is preferable to “You must wear a mask!” Let people know that their problems or complaints have been heard and know to whom they should be referred for further resolution.
- Docents should know their organizations’ emergency protocols as well as to whom they should report any problems or from whom they might receive assistance.

Anna encouraged everyone to take these ideas back to their organizations and reminded them we can continue the conversation on the GPADC website.

Annual Business Meeting: Ratification of Bylaws and Mission Statement. Anna read the revised GPADC Mission Statement and the changes to the Bylaws. Both were unanimously accepted.

Closing

Anna thanked everyone for their participation and again thanked Alex Palma and the staff of Carpenters’ Hall for hosting us. Our next meeting will be on February 15, 2022, at The African American Museum in Philadelphia.

Respectfully submitted by Rebecca Butterfield, Recording Secretary