



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 4, 2006

Contact: Donna M. Abelli

Development & Marketing Manager

t. 413/542-5084

f. 413/542-2152

dmabelli@emilydickinsonmuseum.org

Emily Dickinson Museum Board of Governors Presents Museum Master Plan

AMHERST, Mass.—The Emily Dickinson Museum: The Homestead and The Evergreens has announced that its Board of Governors has adopted a new master plan that will serve as the long-range planning tool for the restoration and improvement of the museum site.

The master plan was initiated in November 2004, a year after the Homestead and The Evergreens, the two adjacent historic houses closely associated with poet Emily Dickinson, merged into a single museum. “Previously owned and operated separately, the reorganization allowed the museum’s new Board of Governors to consider the long-term future of the combined site from a fresh—but truly historic—perspective,” explained Jane Wald, the museum’s executive director. The museum commissioned preservation architect M. Jeffrey Baker, of the Albany, N.Y., firm Mesick Cohen Wilson Baker, LLP, to prepare a master plan based on careful review of its buildings, grounds, historic documents and other related material. The result is a comprehensive blueprint for restoration and care of the Homestead and The Evergreens and for their shared landscape. It also provides options for additional space to accommodate the program requirements of the increasing number of visitors anticipated in coming years.

The plan emerges from the board’s strategic vision for the museum. “We want to employ the assets of Dickinson’s literary legacy and her family’s property to widen the circle of those who encounter the power of her poetry,” states board chair Polly Longworth. “Home was so important to Dickinson, as a concept, as a place. Careful stewardship of her home, which formed the core from which she explored ‘circumference’ (one of her key images), helps orient the museum’s countless visitors within her experience.”

The master plan recommends restoring the interiors of both Dickinson homes to represent more accurately what the poet and her family knew when they occupied the houses. Examples of specific treatments include refurbishing the poet’s bedroom, where she composed her verse late into the night, and reconstructing the glass conservatory where she tended exotic plants in winter.

Another of the important projects in the plan involves rehabilitation of the 19th-century groundscape so loved by the poet that it was a vital presence in her poems. “Each member of the Dickinson family had a particular interest in nature, horticulture or landscape design,” said Wald. “The gradual change in the property’s character from the working gardens on the Homestead side to the carefully designed park on the Evergreens side reflected these interdependent interests.” The master plan proposes to protect historic landscape features while re-creating a Dickinson-era planting scheme.

Recommendations range from replacement of the overgrown hemlock hedge fronting the property to potential reconstruction of the property’s barn. This would fill out a major interpretive element of family life on the three-acre estate, as well as provide much-needed space to accommodate visitor services and programs, collections storage and exhibits.

The museum’s board anticipates that execution of the full master plan, estimated at \$13 million in today’s dollars, will be phased as the extensive fund-raising required will permit. “The plan gives us a lot to think about and choose from in the years ahead,” said Longworth. “We hope that Dickinson admirers across the country and around the world will want to be a part of the museum’s exciting future.”

Announcement of the master plan comes on the heels of a successful completion of an initial \$705,000 campaign. Spurred by a matching grant of \$200,000 secured with the help of Rep. John Olver from the Save America’s Treasures program of the National Park Service, the museum’s board quietly raised the required match for the federal grant. A master plan was one of several objectives of the campaign, which also funded the exterior restoration of the Dickinson Homestead, completed in 2004, and secured funds for critical infrastructure improvements.

The next steps for the museum are to address urgent infrastructure concerns: aging electrical wiring at the Homestead, fire security and water infiltration in the cellars of both houses. The work is currently underway, and scheduled for completion in the summer of 2007.

“Once completed,” Wald said, “our upgraded mechanical systems and water control measures will vastly improve our ability to care properly for the Dickinson houses and collections. They’ll be the foundation for progress toward our ultimate restoration goals, so that every visitor can experience Dickinson’s legacy in the family homes she knew.”

The Emily Dickinson Museum: The Homestead and The Evergreens is owned by the Trustees of Amherst College. For more information about the museum, please call 413/542-8161 or visit the Website at www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org.

###