Welcome to the Fairfield Museum & History Center!

The Fairfield Museum and History Center is a non-profit educational institution chartered in 1903 as the Fairfield Historical Society by the State of Connecticut. Our facility was created in 2007 and features engaging exhibitions, a research library, education classroom, and a meeting hall overlooking Fairfield’s historic Town Green. The Fairfield Museum’s vision is to use history to strengthen community and shape its future. We celebrate the complex stories that explore diverse legacies.

About the Building

The Fairfield Museum building is designed by Centerbrook Architects, based in Essex, CT and the built by Tallman Builders, based in Fairfield, CT. The land surrounding the museum is owned by the Town of Fairfield, the museum rents the “footprint” for its space from the town. The architecture is inspired by the barns and outbuildings from Sturges Farm and the warehouses that were located at the Black Rock wharves.

The 1750 Ogden House

The Fairfield Museum and History Center also owns and maintains the Ogden House, located at 1520 Bronson Road in Fairfield, CT. The house is used for school tours, summer camps and is open to the public on Sundays in the summer.

Ogden House is an exceptional survivor of a typical mid-18th century farmhouse. The house, which escaped the burning of Fairfield by British forces during the American Revolution, provides a glimpse into the life of a family of the "middling sort." Called "the new house" in a 1750 deed, this austere saltbox-style house was built for David Ogden at the time of his marriage to Jane Sturges. For the next 125 years it was home for the Ogden family in the farming and coastal shipping town of Fairfield.
Below are guidelines, policies and procedures for volunteering at the Fairfield Museum. Please review carefully and do not hesitate to contact the Director of Education with any questions.

**Dress Code**
Junior Docents should plan to wear the purple Fairfield Museum t-shirts. Otherwise, Junior Docents are also encouraged to dress in the costumes in the Sun Tavern. Docents should maintain a professional demeanor, but should be comfortable. No flip flops, ripped jeans, or short shorts.

**Name Tags**
Volunteers must always wear nametags. Docents are given Fairfield Museum name tags which are located at the Sun Tavern. If you need a new nametag, please notify the Director of Education.

**Illness**
If an educator is sick, s/he should call the Site Supervisor or Director of Education.

**Emergencies**
If you should witness an accident (involving someone on your tour or another museum visitor) or have an accident yourself, please notify the nearest employee in the building or on the grounds. You may be called upon to verify what took place and to assist in filling out an incident report.

For any serious emergency, call 911.

**Museum Exhibits, Events & Programs**
Docents are kept informed of the Fairfield Museum’s upcoming exhibitions and programs. Docents are encouraged to let visitors know about any upcoming events or programs.

**Publicity / Photography**
No cell phones, photography or videotaping is allowed during a tour. Visitors may take photographs in the Sun Tavern, but without a flash. Exposure to camera flashes damages textiles, manuscripts and some objects.

Any professional publicity, interview and photography requests should go through the Director of Education.

**Honoraria**
Educators should not accept any fees, royalties, honoraria, or other payments, such as tips. Donations can be accepted at the Ogden House or can be handed to the front desk staff.

**Tobacco & Food**
No food or drink is permitted in the Victorian Cottage, Sun Tavern and in the Fairfield Museum exhibitions. Smoking is prohibited in all buildings.
**The Visitors’ Bill of Rights by Judy Rand**

**Comfort – “Meet my basic needs”**
Visitors need fast, easy, obvious access to clean, safe, barrier-free restrooms, fountains, baby-changing tables, and plenty of seating. They also need full access to exhibits.

**Orientation – “Make it easy for me to find my way around”**
Visitors need to make sense of their surroundings. Clear signs and well-planned spaces help them know what to expect, where to go, how to get there and what it’s about.

**Welcome / belonging – “Make me feel welcome”**
Friendly, helpful staff ease visitors’ anxieties. If they see themselves represented in exhibits and programs and on the staff, they’ll feel more like they belong.

**Enjoyment – “I want to have fun!”**
Visitors want to have a good time. If they run into barriers (like broken exhibits, activities they can’t relate to, intimidating labels) they can get frustrated, bored and confused.

**Socializing – “I came to spend time with my family and friends”**
Visitors come for a social outing with family or friends (or connect with society at large). They expect to talk, interact and share the experience; exhibits can set the stage for this.

**Respect – “Accept me for who I am and what I know”**
Visitors want to be accepted at their own level of knowledge and interest. They don’t want exhibits, labels or staff to exclude them, patronize them or make them feel dumb.

**Communication – “Help me understand, and let me talk, too”**
Visitors need accuracy, honesty and clear communication from labels, programs and docents. They want to ask questions, and hear and express differing points of view.

**Learning – “I want to learn something new”**
Visitors come (and bring the kids) “to learn something new,” but they learn in different ways. It’s important to know how visitors learn, and assess their knowledge and interests. Controlling distractions (like crowds, noise and information overload) helps them, too.

**Choice and control – “Let me choose; give me some control”**
Visitors need some autonomy: freedom to choose, and exert some control, touching and getting close to whatever they can. They need to use their bodies and move around freely.

**Challenge and confidence – “Give me a challenge I know I can handle”**
Visitors want to succeed. A task that’s too easy bores them; too hard makes them anxious. Providing a wide variety of experiences will match their wide range of skills.

**Revitalization – “Help me leave refreshed, restored”**
When visitors are focused, fully engaged, and enjoying themselves, time stands still and they feel refreshed: a “flow” experience that exhibits can aim to create.

**Judy Rand** is a consultant specializing in exhibit label writing and editing and a prior member of exhibit teams at the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the Field Museum in Chicago. She is a member of the national group of consultants, The Museum Group. *The Visitors Bill of Rights* is from “The 227-Mile Museum or a Visitors’ Bill of Rights,” which appeared in *Curator: The Museum Journal* (Vol. 44, No. 1, January 2000, pp. 7 – 14).
*Tell me and I forget, show me and I remember, involve me and I understand.*
- Joe Exline

Asking questions is at the heart of inquiry-based learning. The goal is not to ask any questions, but ones that engage students and visitors. Your role is to guide the kids in finding the answers themselves and to encourage them to ask new questions along the way.

**The Art of Asking Good Questions: The Key to Engaging Visitors in Learning**
Good questioning skills may be the world's most unsung talent. Ask the right questions in the right way, and you'll engage people.

**How to use Inquiry in a tour**

**Guiding Question**
Some docents may choose to select a theme for their tour, based on personal experience and expertise. This is perfectly acceptable, as long as the goals of the program are being met.

Open-ended questions should be an integral part of any tour. These are questions that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no” or right or wrong answer, but rather encourage thought and contemplation. These questions are designed to get tour participants to think about what they’re seeing.

If possible, it is a good idea to occasionally address a question directly to one of the group members. This is especially useful for a student who seems interested, but shy. For example, “Mike, what do you think this was used for?” Even if the students don't have nametags, make eye contact and direct a question to him/her. Be careful that the student is not being questioned in an embarrassing or punitive manner.

**Follow-up questions should be asked to clarify and expand important points.** Interpretive questions always call for a few follow-ups, but fact and evaluation questions also need this next step to dig into a work more fully. "Why do you feel that way, Bob?" This encourages museum visitors to substantiate their answers with evidence.