

**Culture and Heritage Committee Update**  
**Pat Audirsch and John Anfinson Co-Chairs**  
**December 2, 2020**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter – July - September**

- The National MRPC Meeting hosted a session for Interpretive Center focusing on how three of them were dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and featuring the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, in Dubuque, Iowa; the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Mississippi, and the Arkansas State University Heritage Sites.
- Key lessons learned include:
  - The National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, in Dubuque, Iowa, noted that people and animals needed visitors. Their otters had gained weight due to a lack of activity.
  - While their numbers were down, their sales were up, as people wanted to help out by purchasing more.
  - All three Interpretive Centers learned how to reach their audiences virtually, and there will continue doing so as some level after the pandemic ends.
  - The Blues Museum received special recognition:
    - Press Announcement - CLARKSDALE, Mississippi November 19, 2020 --Delta Blues Museum has been shortlisted by the British Guild of Travel Writers for 'The Armchair Award' for its Muddy Waters virtual tour in the 2020 BGTW International Tourism Awards. The award recognizes tourism organizations, destinations and visitor attractions that have introduced a new virtual tour as a direct result of the pandemic. It is one of four award categories that recognize tourism projects in the UK and around the world.
- The committee evaluated two Interpretive Center applications from Minnesota but did not have a quorum to vote on them. The discussion of the Aitken application raised the idea that the MRPC should consider a different kind of visitor site, one that functions as an orientation center. Such sites would direct visitors to experiences on and along the river but not have a museum or exhibit focus.
- **2021 Focus**
  - Explore the idea of recognizing orientation centers. This could especially help connect Great River Road visitors to outdoor orientation opportunities.
  - Process and award Interpretive Center applications.
  - Develop a clearer set of qualifications for what does and does not qualify as an Interpretive Center.
  - Increase communication with Interpretive Centers – possibly two Zoom calls annually
  - Connect Interpretive Centers that have pieces of the same story. Help people see the larger stories of the river as represented by the many Interpretive Centers.
  - Assess the focus and interpretation of the Interpretive Centers in each state to determine what stories are missing and how to fill the gaps. This might take applying for a grant to hire someone to do this. Grant for. There is a clear opportunity for grant funding around telling the stories of minority and underserved communities.
    - A new Cold War Museum at Blytheville, Arkansas, for example with tell the story of the Cold War.
  - Clearly define current committee membership and recruit new members where needed.