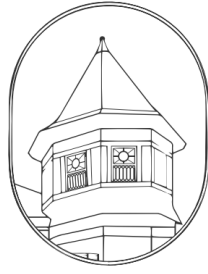


EST.



1982

Avoca Museum & Historical Society

2023 – 2027 Strategic Plan





Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
History.....	5
Organizational Mission, Values, and Vision	8
Accomplishments	9
Assets and Challenges	11
Focus Areas.....	13
Summary.....	15

Avoca Museum 2023 – 2027 Strategic Plan



Executive Summary

The Avoca Museum & Historical Society, established in 1982, is a significant historical institution in the Altavista area of Campbell County, Virginia. Housed in a beautifully restored Victorian mansion, the museum has a rich history with ties to Revolutionary War hero Colonel Charles Lynch. The organization's core mission is to collect, preserve, and interpret the region's cultural and natural history for the benefit of both present and future generations.



The museum's values emphasize the preservation of local history, stewardship, team engagement, collaboration with partners, and open communication with the community. Over the years, the Avoca Museum has achieved several notable milestones, including the restoration of its main house, expansion of outreach programs, and the creation of an arboretum.

The institution plays a vital role in the Altavista community, contributing significantly to local tourism and engaging with various foundations and organizations. However, the museum faces challenges, including the recruitment and retention of volunteers, ensuring sustainable funding, and engaging a diverse range of communities.

Looking ahead, Avoca Museum will focus on four key areas:

- 1) expanding and promoting cultural and preservation programming,
- 2) establishing connections with preservation experts and the local community,
- 3) renovating its facilities, and
- 4) securing the financial resources required for long-term sustainability.

These strategic initiatives will strengthen the museum's position as a central hub for cultural and historical enrichment in the Altavista region.





History of the Organization

The Avoca Museum & Historical Society was established in 1982 and charged to collect, preserve, and interpret the cultural and natural history of the Altavista area and of Campbell County for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Charles Lynch, an immigrant from Ireland, applied a land grant from King George II to acquire the property in 1740. However, he was unable to develop this property called Green Level, he passed away in 1796 and left the land to his son, also named Charles Lynch, who developed the property into a plantation home rich in Native American history. Colonel Charles Lynch is a Revolutionary War hero and developed the saltpeter and lead extraction process that allowed the American soldiers to fight the war. He led the Virginia Militia in the battle of Guilford Courthouse.



The Lynch family maintained the property until 1874 when Colonel Lynch's grandson Charles Henry Lynch's niece Mary Anna Dearing Fauntleroy inherited the property. After the original and second dwellings were destroyed by fire in 1879 and 1900, the current home, a Victorian house, was constructed in 1901 and serves as the centerpiece of Avoca Museum. The house is a commissioned work of the Lynchburg Architect, John Minor Botts Lewis in the Queen Anne style.

The home was maintained as a personal residence until the 1970s with Mary Anne Dearing Fauntleroy's grandson, Dr. Lindley Winston, deeded the property to the Town of Altavista and entered into an agreement that the property be featured it as an historical destination and serve as a memorial to his family. The original agreement stated that it must function as a museum.



The Town of Altavista created a provisional panel who appointed a Commission to oversee the creation of the original board of directors. From this group, the Staunton River Valley Museum was originated. The Staunton River Valley Museum was never an official organization but a group of volunteers who wanted to preserve the history of the property.

Avoca Museum 2023 – 2027 Strategic Plan

Because the house was unoccupied since the mid-1970s, there was need for interior repair before it could be opened to the public. Renovation occurred in the kitchen and exterior painting was completed on the main house. These projects were funded by \$15,000 in grants received from E. R. English and Abbott Laboratories. The small Staunton River Valley Museum opened on weekends in the brick kitchen and showcased a few of the household items and family history with the kitchen serving as the point of welcome for our visitors.

Gradually, through the generosity and hard work of benefactors and volunteers, one room at a time in the main house was stabilized. Gifts of furniture enhanced the revitalization efforts and in 1986 Avoca opened for tours. Driven by the growth of the museum, a need for increased fundraising and expanded volunteer involvement, a historical society was founded in 1982. The new society transitioned the Staunton River Valley Museum into the Avoca Museum and Historical Society with Rusty Hicks serving as its first president.



In 1991 an administrator was hired to oversee issues dealing with current policies, operations, facilities and programs, member recruitment, hiring a director to manage day-to-day operations (hired in 1995), and the feasibility of acquiring or constructing storage, exhibition, and administrating offices. 1991 and 1992 were a watershed for Avoca. The Lane Company, in collaboration with Country Living Magazine, refurbished the main house. Donations of furniture by the Lane Company, fabrics, window treatments, and accessories transformed the house. National and local media coverage expanded visitation, and Avoca enjoyed a successful year.



A five-year campaign was launched in 1995 to restore the exterior of the house, rehabilitate the farm office, and expand the school and community outreach programs. The museum has been featured in national media outlets for its historic preservation initiatives. It has also come to be known as a premier site for education and social events for the Altavista community. Major additions to the site include a one-acre Arboretum and construction of a first-rate restroom facility. Since 1995, all buildings have been completely restored “from the ground up.”

In the years since the initial restoration of the Victorian home and outbuildings, the historic society has continued to improve on the property. In 2001 Avoca’s Historical Society completed the Nancy and Donal Dinwiddie Arboretum. This massive garden showcases the diverse natural history and beauty of some of Central Virginia’s most recognizable foliage. In addition to this garden, the original Victorian Garden planted by Mary Anna Dearing in the 1880s was discovered and fully restored.



Avoca Museum 2023 – 2027 Strategic Plan

In the last 20 years, Avoca Museum & Historical Society has added a large brick patio to serve both private and community events, expanded parking facilities, created a band stand structures to accommodate live music, and installed a large exterior restroom facility. These have all worked to attract additional visitors to the museum where each person learns about hundreds of years of important history housed on the property.



Avoca Museum & Historical Society works directly with the Town of Altavista as the primary tourism attraction within the town limits and one of the primary historic attractions for the Central Virginia region. The museum facilitates many town sponsored events and contributes to the general foot traffic of the town. The town sponsors the museum by providing the Society with significant funding towards operational expenses and the Public Works Department assists with repairs and maintenance of the property. The Altavista community has strongly supported the museum since its inception in 1982 and close to 200 mostly local individual donors provide significant volunteer and financial contributions to the museum. Avoca's Historical Society also has partnerships with many local and regional foundations such as the Minnie and Bernard Lane Foundation, the Powell Foundation and the Greater Lynchburg Community Foundation amongst others who generously support the museum operational, programming and exhibit expenses. Avoca's Historical Society remains extremely grateful to all partners of the museum.

Today, the house is a Virginia landmark, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and is maintained as a historical museum. The collection, displays, programs and interpretations are planned to showcase the cultural and natural history of the region. The property is used for education and recreational purposes and serves the people of the greater Altavista area.



Mission

Avoca Museum and Historical Society collects, preserves, and interprets the cultural and natural history of the Altavista area and of Campbell County for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations.



Organizational Values

The Society is completely invested in carrying out our mission and is driven by our core values;

- **Preservation of our Local History.** We are dedicated to providing opportunities for our diverse community, while conveying the importance of preserving the past.
- **Integrity of our Stewardship.** We are trusted stewards of the museum’s assets, while working towards enhancing them.
- **Engagement of a Diverse Team.** We work as a respectful and prideful team and are resolute and passionate as we advance towards meeting our goals.
- **Collaboration between our Team and our Partners.** We possess a strong collaborative relationship with our community and are active contributors.
- **Communication within our Community.** We value the opinions and suggestions from our membership and community at large to further advance our mission.

Vision

Avoca Museum seeks to create a unique experience for the greater Altavista area and its visitors by providing a venue for special cultural events while preserving and interpreting the many layers of our local history.



Accomplishments

Avoca takes pride in its numerous achievements, which have been made possible through the efforts of the present Director, Board, and volunteers. The organization has notably grown its research, programs, and events, while the Facility Committee has made significant strides in enhancing the museum property. A modern website and a robust collaborative relationship with the community has been established. Additionally, there has been a noteworthy increase in grants, sponsorships, and investments to bolster the Museum's mission.

The Director and Team

Avoca has flourished under the leadership of the current **Director** who has initiated and implemented numerous changes for the office, buildings, and grounds of the Museum. Recognizing the importance of high-quality events and programs, Avoca has increased the work hours of the current **Events/Program Coordinator**.

Avoca's Board of Directors

The board brings people with diverse backgrounds, expertise, and perspectives to the Museum. The Board's networking has opened doors to new partnerships, collaborations, and opportunities for the Museum's growth.

Avoca has a team of dedicated and valued Avoca **volunteers** who work tirelessly to assist with the expansion of programs and events. They play a vital role in the accomplishments of the Museum.

The Museum houses a rich collection of paintings, photographs, and artifacts. Realizing that too many of these collections were hidden from view in storage, a part-time **curator** was hired to preserve and catalog the Museum's artifacts and to curate diverse and thought-provoking exhibits.

Expansion of Research, Programs, and Events

Recognizing the importance of community outreach, Avoca has expanded its **programs** and diverse **events** to provide high-quality educational programs as well as fun and engaging activities for students and their families. These **programs and events** include on average 6-10 field trips annually, Friday Concert Series, Easter Egg Hunts, Spooky Story Tales, movie nights, a soulful gospel sing, Mother's Day Tea, Kentucky Derby, Night at the Museum, Harvest Wine Festival and other activities for the community and surrounding areas. These events have helped attract more than 10,000 annual visitors to the museum. In addition to these events we host between 8-12 private events on an annual basis which brings an additional 1500-2000 visitors and comprise almost 10% of the museum's annual fundraising revenue.

Avoca has expanded its **research** base through the temporary hiring of a local historian. This research will inform and fuel the Museum's exhibits and public programs which includes the Manumission Project.



Website, Media, and Marketing

To embrace the digital age, Avoca has created a new, interactive website, and has increased its marketing and media coverage through various social media platforms.

Facility (grounds and building) Committee

A newly formed **Facility Committee** made up of Board Members and volunteers has diligently worked to make vast improvements to the buildings and grounds. Noticeable repairs have been made, landscaping has been enhanced, and many other tasks have been completed as this group works relentlessly to ensure Avoca remains beautiful and treasured.



Collaboration

Avoca has built a strong collaborative team with the Town, non-profit organizations, and businesses in the community and surrounding areas cultivating a camaraderie based on trust and mutual respect. This **collaboration** contributes to a positive and inclusive organizational culture for the people and businesses of the community and region.

Increased Grants, Sponsorships, Investments

Grants and **sponsorships** are significantly important for funding the Museum and the Museum's mission. Through grant writings and the development of a new sponsorship program, Avoca has benefitted from an increase in these funds. To safeguard financial sustainability, and to diversify revenue, the museum has begun to chart a path to a more equitable future through the exploration of **investment** options.



Assets and Challenges

Assets

Beautiful Property

A core asset to the Museum is our **stunning Victorian mansion**. The home has seen extensive renovations inside and out over the past three decades and remains in excellent condition thanks to support from the Town of Altavista, volunteers, and a dedicated board who serve as stewards of the Museum. This facility serves as a cornerstone of activity, with weddings, educational, and cultural events as highlights. Its close proximity to the Town as well as the many residents of Region 2000 and beyond, make it a destination all can enjoy. In addition to the Museum itself, the **outbuildings and grounds** are a spectacular backdrop for visitors and patrons alike.



Community Support and Involvement

The community of Altavista is amazingly generous. From the Town itself to the many corporate and community focused groups that partner to move the museum forward, the breadth and depth of involvement is critical to our success.

When staff and the board determined in 2019 that the mansion’s exterior was deteriorating and immediate action was needed, funds that the Town had set aside for maintenance were immediately available. Within a year, all repairs were complete, bringing it back to its glory. In addition to being a primary funder, the town also stands ready to assist in maintaining the home and property when called upon, including landscaping, cleanup after events, and addressing mechanical needs. The town’s support is truly a cornerstone of the museum’s health.

Corporate sponsors are also a key driver of events at Avoca. Over the last several years, Avoca has more than doubled the number of events, and support from sponsors help to make this possible. While the number of events has increased, the diversity of events has also broadened.

The generous nature of the Altavista area is also highlighted by the support from other community organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce and Altavista on Track. Partnering with these organizations on events brings in additional volunteers and skills to enhance the experience.

Active Board and Volunteers

As with any non-profit organization, the true strength of the Museum lies in an active, engaged and skilled board of directors. With some members serving from the beginning, acting as critical keepers of institutional knowledge, to new members willing and ready to help any way possible, the board of directors for the museum are its backbone.

Along with a strong board, volunteers are another critical piece to ensure the continued growth of the museum. Over the past several years, new volunteer groups have been created that focus on certain skillsets and interests, such as a grounds group that has already made a visible difference in the property and surroundings. During large events, such as decorating for Christmas, The Kentucky Derby, and Friyay Cheers, many volunteers come together to make the events successful. They are truly the backbone of the organization.



Challenges

Volunteers

Recruiting and retaining volunteers is a challenge for Avoca. Volunteers are vital to our ability to continue event, activities, and maintain and improve the property. Avoca is fortunate to have a full-time executive director and a part time event director, but our volunteers are critical to future program growth. Recruiting and maintaining a diverse group of individuals to serve in the various volunteer positions on a regular basis or on an ad-hoc basis is a challenge. While we have volunteers who commit to a particular position and to a specific day and time, they also go on vacation, have appointments, emergencies, or get sick and we must replace them, often at the last minute. As such, it is vital to recruit volunteers who can fill regular positions or serve as a substitute when a regular volunteer is out.

Sustainable Funding

Sustainable funding requires innovative efforts to solicit donations, secure grant funding, and raise money through events. The Town of Altavista’s continued support is vital and the Board has been a good steward of every dollar raised and continuously looks for ways to lower operation costs. Realizing that growth of the organization relies heavily on donor support, new funding sources must be identified. Some of these new sources have been identified as an increase in private rentals which will require the expansion of the current museum’s facilities.

Engaging Diverse Communities

Diversity is a strength of an organization, and as such, programing needs to address the need to increase the diversity of events to draw more interest and engagement from a wide range of individuals and groups. While several new programs have been introduced of the last few years good success much more can be done to attract a new and more diverse audience to the museum.

Challenges

Volunteers

Sustainable Funding

Engaging Diverse Communities



Focus Areas

In 2023, the Avoca Museum & Historical Society Board of Directors and staff engaged in a strategic planning discussion where our strengths and challenges were reviewed and discussed and direction for our work was established. During the next three years, Avoca will focus on the following areas:

Focus Area 1

Expand and promote cultural and preservation programming onsite and within our service area.

- *Redesign outdated exhibits to create an accurate and inviting representation of history. This includes a focus on the six primary stories of the Avoca historical society. It encompasses but is not limited to regional Native American, African American, Revolutionary War, American Civil War, The Edwardian/Victorian Era, Establishment of the Town of Altavista and the story of local industry (including the Lane Company)*
- *Develop exhibits and preservation efforts highlighting the contributions of the African American community.*
- *Explore and develop new exhibits and preservation initiatives relevant to the Virginia Standards of Learning.*
- *Design programming and events to support the needs and preferences of the service region. This programming includes K-12 field trips, historical reenactments*

Justification: Avoca Museum has exceptional exhibits although some are quickly becoming outdated and need to be refurbished or retired with new educational exhibits developed. These exhibits will keep the Museum vibrant and attract visitors from throughout our service area and share the story of the Origin of Avoca.

Focus Area 2

Connect Avoca to preservation experts, community members, educational resources, and relevant partners.

- *Build a relationship with researchers who have expertise in the region’s culture, historical events, and preservation strategies.*
- *Increase the number of volunteers, docents, and researchers by engaging the region’s residents along with students and educators from area schools, colleges, and universities to support the Avoca Museum.*
- *Establish partnerships with professional organizations that will provide guidance to the Avoca Museum as it serves as one of the region’s economic drivers.*
- *Develop a communication strategy to publicize the work of the Museum throughout the region utilizing all marketing resources.*

Justification: The Avoca Museum is centrally located to serve as a economic driver for the Altavista region. Although our Board of Directors and our staff are fully invested in the work, additional volunteers are needed to support the expanding programs and events that will lead to a more vibrant and sustainable tourism destination.

Focus Area 3

Construct, renovate, and renew facilities to support expanding programming opportunities and increased visitation.

- *Evaluate existing facilities, parking options, and visitor accessibility.*
- *Prepare a Capital Improvement Plan outlining construction, renovation, and refurbishing needs to support expanding events, programming, and preservation requirements.*
- *Enhance the property’s gardens to showcase the historical and educational features of the outdoor spaces.*

Justification: The Avoca Museum has demonstrated its capacity to serve as a tourism destination and must maintain and improve its facilities to continue to be the premium site for cultural and historical programming and events.

Focus Area 4

Secure financial resources to ensure the long-term sustainability of Avoca preservation efforts and programs.

- *Develop strategies to address facility maintenance, capital improvement fund development, and management of operating costs.*
- *Increase the Avoca Museum endowment through efficient investment strategies and the addition of donor gifts.*
- *Expand revenue generated from fundraising events, membership dues, grant requests, and programming.*
- *Plan for additional staffing positions.*

Justification: Funding and cost management planning are vital to manage operational expenses to ensure organizational sustainability.

Summary

The Avoca Museum & Historical Society has a rich history rooted in the Altavista area of Campbell County, Virginia. It is housed in a stunning Victorian mansion that was constructed in 1901, with connections to Colonel Charles Lynch, a Revolutionary War hero. Over the years, the organization has transformed the former private residence into a historical museum dedicated to preserving the cultural and natural history of the region.

The museum is dedicated to its mission to collect, preserve, and interpret the area's history for the education and enjoyment of current and future generations. Its values include the preservation of local history, stewardship, engagement with a diverse team, collaboration with partners, and open communication with the community, all to advance the organization's mission.

Over the years, Avoca Museum has achieved several milestones, such as restoring its main house and outbuildings “from the ground up,” expanding its outreach programs, creating an arboretum, and establishing an events area featuring a brick patio and stage. It plays a vital role in the community, contributing to the town's tourism and collaborating with various foundations and organizations.

While the museum has many assets, including a beautiful property, broad community support, an active board, and dedicated volunteers, it also faces challenges, such as recruiting and retaining additional volunteers, ensuring sustainable funding, and engaging diverse communities.

In the coming years, Avoca Museum plans to focus on expanding and promoting cultural and preservation programming, connecting with preservation experts and community members, renovating facilities, and securing financial resources to ensure long-term sustainability. These focus areas aim to further enrich the museum's role as a cultural and historical hub in the Altavista region.