

BOONE HISTORY MUSEUMS

MAMIE DOUD EISENHOWER BIRTHPLACE

The city of Boone and the surrounding area are fortunate to have the Mamie Doud Eisenhower Birthplace, centrally located and with historical significance that holds great potential for engaging 21st Century visitors. However, time, a severe lack of funding, and a change in the direction of museum trends and tourism have all played against the preservation and success of the birthplace.

History

The Mamie Doud Eisenhower Birthplace (MDEB) was dedicated June 22, 1980. Minutes of the March 24, 1981 MDEB Foundation annual meeting reported that "we ended the 1980 season with over 11,000 visitors from all 50 states and over 20 countries." That number was provided by docents, to Mara MacKay, current Executive Director, as a goal to attain since there has long been a hope to return to the glory days of the early years when the birthplace first opened. Back in the day, in the 80's, there were tea shops, curio shops and attractions all along Carroll Street which are long gone.

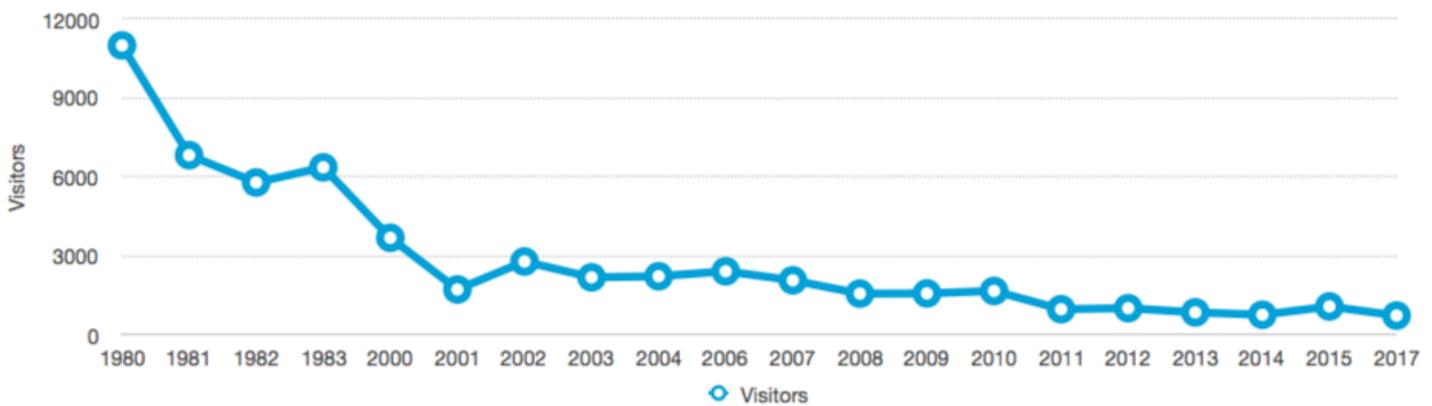
With concern mounting over a chronic lack of attendance, members of the BCHS board discovered there could be hidden factors in some of the numbers being inflated. A newspaper article written the day after the dedication reported, "near 5,000 was estimated at the dedication, and Bob Hope was one of the speakers," leading the reader to believe a more realistic attendance number for the first year was 6,000. The following seasons saw 6,835 visitors in 1981, 5,800 in 1982, and 6,376 in 1983. By 2000, admission totals had dropped by half. In 2001 attendance dropped again by half to 1,740. The steady decline continued and was a major reason for the release of the MDEB to the BCHS in 2006.

In 2006, the MDEB Foundation liquidated their assets and turned over the birthplace to the BCHS, and then followed the liquidation with resignation letters, by all Foundation board members that completed the MDEB-BCHS merger which is recorded in the minutes. The Foundation members were encouraged to join the Society and to hold annual meetings, but by and large few Foundations members did, and no MDEB Foundation annual meetings were ever recorded. Attendance in 2006 was recorded as 2,430. Charles Irwin, former Executive Director, was quoted as saying "Like most museums throughout the US, the Historical Society and the birthplace have faced declining admissions and failing membership in recent years."

In 2007 attendance was 2,086 at the birthplace, but in 2008 attendance dropped to 1,582. In 2009 there were 1,600 visitors. At the board meeting on October 21, 2009, comments were made about "doing something about the musty smell in the house," and the need to "think of other ways to use the house since the fame of Eisenhower (and Mamie) is getting lost on generations coming up." At the annual meeting on January 26, 2011, comments were again made about attendance decreasing

each year which prompted discussion about the fact that “interest is dwindling the farther from the Eisenhower years we get and bus tours in general are down so we need to find a new way to attract attention.”

In 2010 there were 1,683 visitors, but in 2011 there was a sharp drop to 990. 2012 saw a slight increase to 1,024, but in 2013 there were 866 visitors, and in 2014 only 769. A small increase occurred in 2015, reaching 1,095, but in 2017 only 750 visitors came to the birthplace. These numbers are over a five month season. For seven months through winter the birthplace is closed and the organization that has paid all of the bills, year-round, for the last 11 years is the BCHS. During those 11 years the imbalance of revenue and expenses at the birthplace has mounted. Many of the members of the group who are seeking to take over the birthplace have been invited to help with fundraisers in the past. For the most part, there has been minimal response from docents and others to help or to come up with new ideas for fundraisers, even for repairs, and the last attempt was so dismal that only \$149 was raised at a fundraiser for Mamie’s.



Attendance numbers continue to decline and the birthplace continues to have a musty smell, with historical artifacts in the basement deteriorating due to high humidity levels. There is a report of the Flood of 1993 that describes “flooding in Boone on the evening of July 8 resulted in about 3” of water to back up from the floor drain onto the floor of the furnace room, and subsequently soaked most of the carpet in the exhibit and gift shop areas.” Prior to the Flood of 1993, another flood occurred, and in neither case was there mention of remediation of the wet carpet or dampness, or inspection for mold.

Again on June 27, 2014 4” of water poured into and throughout the birthplace museum lower level from the sump pump which was routed through the storm drain. A plumber was called to work on the drain, and a cleaning company was called in to take up the water and dry the carpet. During the time the basement area was drying, another flood occurred due to the fact that the cleaners disconnected and disabled the sump pump to plug in the dryers. Subsequently, the sump pump was routed outside, but the carpet was never taken up nor was the floor under the carpet or the wall surfaces behind the display cabinets ever checked for mold. During the 2014 flood, the humidity level reached 82% and items fell off of the walls.

Despite the BCHS having enormous challenges at two other sites, the then new director, and her staff, made several adjustments, improvements and provided solutions for several operational challenges. Examples are: high capacity dehumidifiers were put in the home, the porch was repaired, fire inspections and some safety updates were made, some HVAC repairs were made, security was updated to the degree possible at the time, inspections of the wood on the exterior were conducted by qualified tradesman, docents were given greater responsibilities to improve consistency of operations. In addition, the BCHS actively pursued new visitors by spending over \$1,000 each year on brochures, ads and other promotional activities. At the end of 2017 the BCHS board of directors made the decision to suspend operations at the birthplace for up to 2 years to evaluate the options for funding, to schedule repairs, and to consider other uses that could generate new interest and revenue in the 21st Century.

Many factors went into the decision to close temporarily, such as environmental hazards, for visitors and volunteers, structural hazards and a myriad of threats and liabilities. The board started to recognize several identifiable safety hazards including mold, uneven walkways, security issues, lack of training procedures, lack of a formal safety plan in case of emergencies, reduced availability of docents and related concerns about the age and ability of some docents to lock doors and set alarms, along with an overarching security concern of having only one docent at the site in the event of an unexpected intrusion or a medical event.



Basement gallery

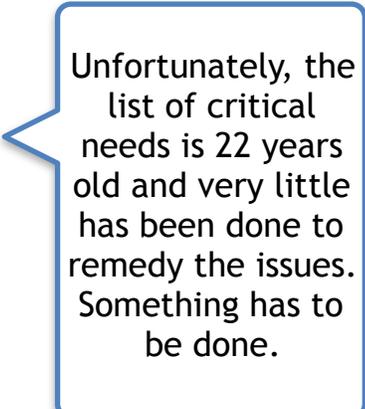


Bathroom

In January 2018, mold was confirmed throughout the MDEB. To ensure a safe environment for children and adults who visit or volunteer the BCHS seeks to reduce illnesses directly related to exposure to mold at the birthplace. The mold is both visible and invisible, and it must be removed by a mold remediation professional to prevent future mold growth. People who are affected by mold will experience increased colds, flu, allergies, chicken pox, cold sores, severe respiratory problems, memory loss, cancer, autoimmune diseases and more.

A 1996 assessment, sponsored by the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property was completed and within that assessment safety hazards and other critical needs were identified at the MDEB. Here are the level one “high priority” and level two “necessary” corrections, from twenty-years ago, that have not been fully addressed:

- Unsafe walkways
- Inspect and repair exterior woodwork by a qualified tradesman
- Annual roofing inspections by a qualified tradesman
- Display case replacements
- Lighting issues that are directly linked to safety concerns
- More trained and qualified professionals in supervisory positions
- Make exhibits that are in the lower level handicap accessible
- Replace all window glass with UV filtering glass to prevent fading
- Develop a maintenance schedule and procedures
- Keep a maintenance log
- Schedule ventilation Updates
- Fire Code and Security Upgrades
- Routine Inspection and recording of the conditions of historical artifacts
- Create a handicap restroom on the grounds
- Address variations in length, height and slope of the stairs (violation of code)
- Improvement of signs and historical displays
- Find and apply collections storage containment solutions
- Develop a collection management committee to study problems
- Apply and adhere to photo preservation standards and policies
- Increase staffing — there should always be two people at the site for security
- Video cameras are a necessity
- HVAC upgrades
- Severe weather plan
- Parking is insufficient



Unfortunately, the list of critical needs is 22 years old and very little has been done to remedy the issues. Something has to be done.

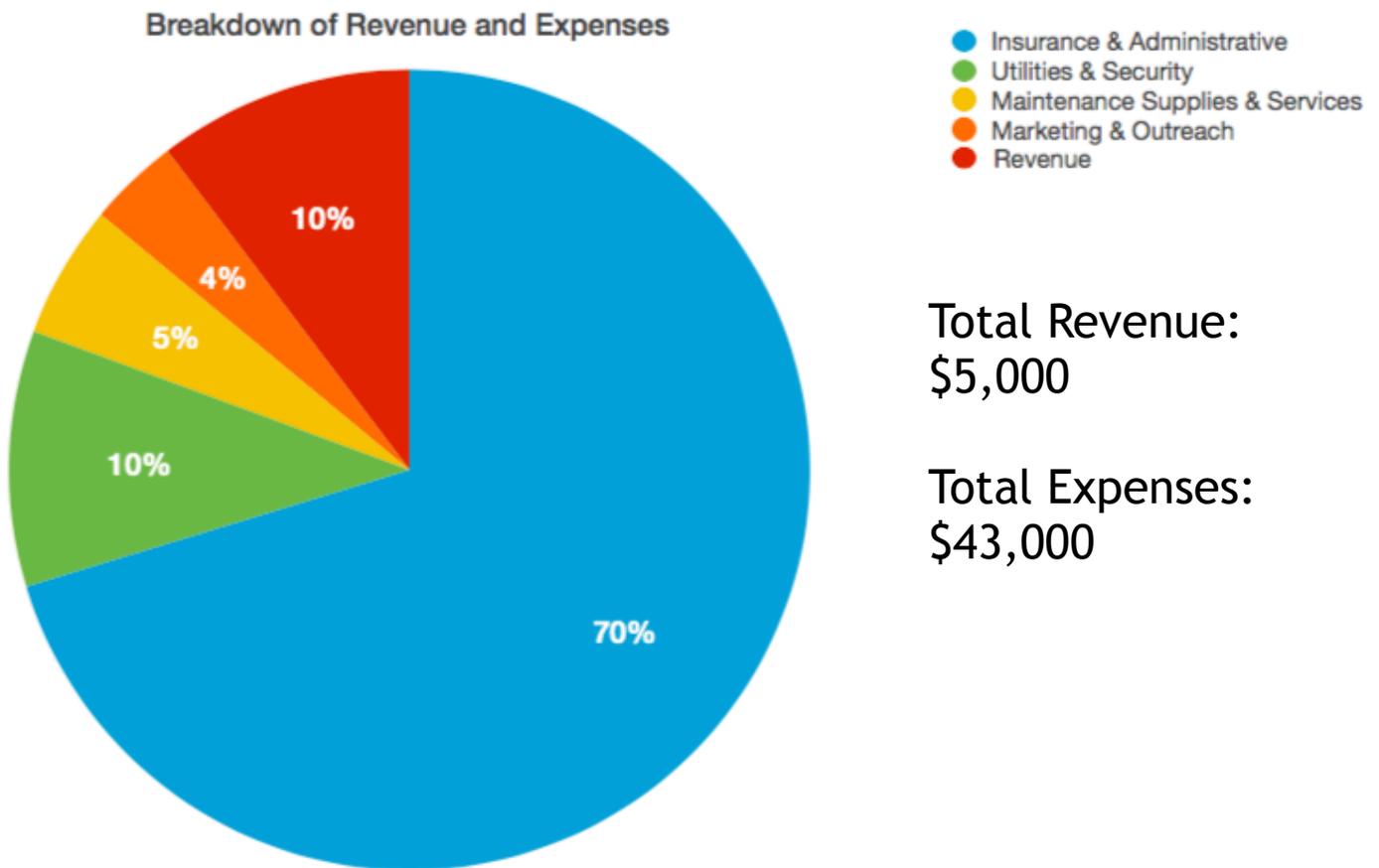
There has been much emphasis on reopening as a museum as the only acceptable function of the historic facility. In light of declining interest and admissions, it has been proved that it cannot be self-sustaining at a \$5-10 ticket with such low visitor numbers. Budgets have been made up, but include only utilities with a “getting by” attitude. The cost of operating the MDEB has been subsidized by the BCHS since 2006, and have increased every year.

In the 21st Century, to continue as a museum, this facility would need to bring in \$100,000 annually. This would allow the Mamie Doud Eisenhower Birthplace the ability to pay for a full time facility manager to oversee operations, support grant writing, maintain the collection, preserve the facility, update the exhibits as needed, support volunteer recruitment, schedule and supervise volunteers, develop and apply an operations manual, and advertise for more visitors to come to the birthplace; also, to pay for regular upkeep and maintenance costs. In the meantime, the artifacts have been removed from the musty basement to a new dedicated Boone’s First Family gallery at the History Center where visitors of all ages and abilities can attend, year around, in a safe and climate controlled facility.

2017 Costs of operating the MDEB are on average with recent years, with the exception of increased marketing expenses. See chart below.

Mamie Doud Eisenhower Birthplace Revenue & Expenses

ITEM	AMOUNT
Insurance & Administrative	\$34,000.00
Utilities & Security	\$5,000.00
Maintenance Supplies & Services	\$2,600.00
Marketing & Outreach	\$1,770.00
Revenue	\$5,000.00



If half of the insurance/administration costs are overlooked than the disparity between revenue and expenses shows that the Society (and for some years the MDEB Foundation) have not been bringing in enough revenue to cover expenses. Generally, grants are not focused on the costs of operating, and to operate as a museum exclusively you would need to increase administration, at the site, to be safe and relevant for future generations.