

Saluting Excellence

| BY EDWARD H. ABLE, JR. |

ANNIE MOORE was 15 on January 1, 1892, when she and her two brothers arrived from Ireland to become the first of what would be 12 million immigrants whose first footstep in America would be on a small island in New York harbor. Gertrude Schneider arrived in 1921 holding onto the comfort of a remembrance from home: "I treasured him and he came over with me . . . the teddy bear was part of Switzerland." **"THIS MORNING IS FINE WEATHER** but there is very many sad & heavy hearts in this pen it is a gloomy place to spend the 4th of July & the first one I have spent away from home since I have been a soldier . . . I am in the Bull pen sad & lonely tonight." Private Levi Whitaker, Company H, 11th Connecticut Infantry wrote these words on July 4, 1864. Whitaker was imprisoned behind the 20-foot-tall pine logs that marked the perimeter of the Confederate prisoner of war camp at Andersonville. Used for only 14 months in 1864-1865, the prison held more than 45,000 Union soldiers, its poor conditions killing nearly 13,000 of them. **AFTER SO MANY YEARS**, how do we know about Annie Moore and Gertrude Schneider and Levi Whitaker? In large part, because of museums. **THIS YEAR**, the National Park Service celebrates 100 years of national park museums. In 2006, the American Association of Museums will observe its centennial. Throughout our intertwined histories, the National Park Service and AAM have collaborated to strengthen the ability of the Service and the national parks to serve the public, to preserve and share the stories of all the Annies and Gertrudes and Levis in our history. **AAM RECOGNIZES EXCELLENCE** in museums through accreditation, the field's seal of approval. Nationwide, only 750 museums have achieved this distinction, including 10 national park museums. Through a rigorous process of self-study and peer review, these park museums have demonstrated that they meet or exceed national museum standards. The Accreditation Commission has commended several of the accredited park museums for exceptional institutional planning, excellent collections planning and stewardship, outstanding interpretive efforts, great strides in conservation and collections care practices, and first-rate programs for students. **THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE** has its own rigorous methods of evaluating its 350 museums. Why seek accreditation on top of this? **SUPERINTENDENT DONALD CAMPBELL** at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park puts it this way: "I have been

through the AAM's accreditation process twice. Both times were highly rewarding experiences for me as park superintendent. The AAM's extraordinary visiting committee provided a rigorous, professional, holistic examination of our museum programs, and gave us clear goals for the future. The process provided an intense synergy between the visiting committee and park and regional office staff that benefited the park's museum program both short and long term." **AAM LOOKS FORWARD** to even more national park museums joining the ranks of accredited museums nationwide. By earning the highest recognition in the field, these museums help the National Park Service demonstrate its excellent stewardship of priceless and irreplaceable resources that have unique value to the American community. **MUSEUMS COLLECT** the func-

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tional and the priceless. The things that bring depth and life to the stories of history. The things that are tangible, that we can reach out and touch (but shouldn't!). The things that help us imagine what it might have been like to be a young Irish girl arriving at Ellis Island or a war-weary soldier horrified by the conditions of his imprisonment. They are one of our best tools for inviting the American people to learn more about our history. Their excellence is a goal we all share. **WE SALUTE** the National Park Service on the milestone of its museum centennial and look forward to another 100 years of partnership.

Edward H. Able, Jr., is the President and next CEO of AAM.

The 10 national park museums accredited by the association are Andersonville National Historic Site, Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island Immigration Museum, Clara Barton National Historic Site, Fort Sumter National Monument, Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, Independence National Historical Park, Manassas National Battlefield Park, Museum of Westward Expansion at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, and San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park.