Stories of the Past:

Immersive History Museums as Historical Fiction

A thesis

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Abstract

Living history museums, re-enactments of historic events, and historic house museums all offer unique encounters with the past. As "immersive history museums," these types of institutions can be regarded as the "historical fiction" of the museum field. As such, these museums can and should take some measure of creative license in their interpretations of history. Rather than focusing on minute historical authenticity and factual material, these institutions should strive to create generally historic atmospheres in order to make their content comprehensible and relevant to visitors, simultaneously offering environments in which visitors can fulfill their own objectives unrelated to specific content. Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, and Museums of Old York in York, Maine, serve as case studies to illustrate instances of appropriate and inappropriate use of creative license in immersive museum settings.

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Preface

Ask any museum professional what drew him or her to the museum field, and a poignant museum memory from childhood will likely follow. My story is no different. As a child, my family vacations included visits to museums, historic houses, presidential libraries, battlefields, and any roadside tree, rock, or vista graced with a historic marker. I quickly grew accustomed to listening to tour guides, reading exhibit labels, and participating in demonstrations of historic crafts and games.

Of the myriad museums visits I experienced as a child, two in particular stand out in my mind. The first occurred when I was about seven years old, and my family and I were visiting Fort Stanwix in Rome, New York, en route to Boston. On the day we visited, the schedule of events included a re-enactment of a bayonet charge. When it came time for the demonstration, an interpreter first explained the function of a bayonet, and then the soldiers secured the weapons to the ends of their guns and proceeded to charge towards the crowd of onlookers. One thought ran through my young mind: "This is it;" in my seven-year-old mind, the soldiers were never going to stop charging, and soon their sharp bayonets would skewer us, their apparent opponents. I was, of course, happily surprised when the soldiers stopped short of the crowd and disbanded, taking the dreaded bayonets away with them.

On another family vacation several years later, I found myself at Fort William Historical Park in Thunder Bay, Ontario. The fort's early 19th century

setting was ideal for presenting the region's early fur trading industry, and shortly after my family and I began exploring, a troupe of re-enactors portraying fur traders arrived by canoe, carrying a load of furs and supplies. As the fur traders unloaded their boats, they handed various boxes, barrels, bags, and furs to kids to carry into the fort. As an awkward pre-teen, I stood on the sidelines secretly wishing to be a part of the fun, until a fur trader came up to me holding a barrel. "Here, can you carry this for me?" he asked. Of course, I happily obliged, and my parents snapped countless pictures of me holding that barrel.

Experiences like these inspired a lifelong love for history and history museums. Recreationally, I still visit museums regularly, and, professionally, I aspire to work in one. In the course of my undergraduate and graduate education, I have studied both history and the study of history itself, and I have formulated very definite opinions about effective and ineffective ways of addressing historical content, particularly in museum settings.

My thoughts regarding effective methods of historical study have evolved throughout my time as a history and American studies undergraduate student and a history and museum studies graduate student. As an undergraduate, I was convinced that history should be treated academically, and in my capstone history class, I railed against the course's assigned reading, a microhistorical study written much like a novel. "This is too much like fiction," I argued. "Where are the facts?"

In graduate school, I began studying museum theory and thinking about the ways that history is presented in museum settings. I started reading visitor

studies and thinking about the fundamental functions of a museum, and my opinions began to change. I began to think about history differently, concluding, among other things, that the study of history is not a study of facts and figures; it's the study of people. History is about trying to understand how people felt, why they acted as they did, and how their stories illuminate fundamental truths about the human experience. History is about perpetually asking "why? why? why?" and tracing stories further and further back to uncover truths not immediately obvious.

Museums, particularly those that provide experiential and immersive environments, strive to portray history in such fundamentally human terms. The stories told at such places are the stories of people and the ways that they lived their lives. In these museum settings, visitors search for personal connections between past and present, seeking meaningful interaction with historical content, their contemporary peers, and even themselves. As such, these museums are appropriate venues for presenting history in ways that highlight a distinctly human element.

Presenting history in this type of unique environment necessitates unique methodologies. Museums can and should address history differently than do books or schools, taking advantage of their ability to encourage social interaction, to convey information using multiple senses, and to provide kinetic demonstrations of historic activities. In doing so, museums differentiate themselves from other educational institutions and leisure activities, creating a

unique place for themselves as institutions that allow visitors to learn about the past and the present through unique, memorable, and fun experiences.

In thinking about my own memorable museum experiences from childhood, I am reminded of many reasons that the museum's way of "doing history" is effective. Watching the bayonet demonstration at Fort Stanwix, I felt a personal connection to the past, gaining a small glimpse of what 18th century soldiers must have felt in the heat of battle. At Fort William, I physically carried a barrel into the fort, but out of the experience, I carried a sense of a fur trader's lifestyle on the Canadian frontier, experiencing a time and place where furs provided a livelihood and canoes were a major mode of transportation. From these experiences, I didn't learn facts. I couldn't tell you what kind of guns the soldiers were carrying or the specific years in which fur trading was a major Canadian industry. Museums are not the place to address such minute factual information; instead, these venues are particularly well-suited for creating generally historic atmospheres in which visitors can both learn about the past and reflect on the present.

My ideas regarding historic interpretation in museums culminate in this thesis. Here, I take an academic approach to ideas that I have long believed to be true from anecdotal evidence. By looking at the ways in which people view history and the ways they use museums, I have concluded that immersive history museums are the "historical fiction" of the museum field. Institutions that try to re-create historic environments, including living history museums and historic house museums, can and should take some measure of creative license in their

interpretations of history. In moderation, addressing history in this way helps to make museum content and museums themselves relevant to contemporary visitors.

In this study, Chapter 1 outlines a theoretical framework for the most effective ways that museums can fulfill their own educational objectives and those of their visitors. This includes discussion of the ways in which individuals view history, how they use museums, and what museums can do to reach their full potential as informal learning centers. Chapters 2 and 3 offer case studies of museums that effectively and ineffectively put these ideas into practice. Chapter 2 offers a case study of Greenfield Village, a living history village in Dearborn, Michigan, founded by Henry Ford in the 1920s. In many instances, Ford effectively blended factual accuracy and creative interpretations of history to create generally historic atmospheres in which visitors could both learn and spend their time enjoyably. Chapter 3 examines the historic activities of Elizabeth Perkins, an influential resident of York, Maine, in the early and mid-20th century. Perkins maintained involvement in a number of historical organizations in York, restoring old buildings, putting together museum exhibits, and planning historically based festivals. In many cases, Perkins abused the ability to creatively interpret history, portraying blatantly fictional stories as facts and misleading visitors for the sake of entertainment. Though Perkins's intentions were not malicious, her actions represent instances of extreme and inappropriate historical alteration.

A study of this sort raises a plethora of related issues regarding the historical context of the era in which a museum was created. In the case of Ford and Perkins, this context chiefly pertains to the nationalistic and xenophobic mood of early 20th century America, and the use of history as propaganda to enhance this mood. A study of greater depth and scope could address these issues, but the limited focus of this paper precludes them from extensive consideration. Here, the argument focuses on visitor interaction with history in museum settings, and it is therefore most important to consider how the creators' decisions reflect museum education theory.

This study advocates for new interpretive methodologies in immersive history sites. Rather than focusing on historical authenticity and factual material, these museums should make use of creative license in their interpretations of history. In doing so, immersive history sites can make their content more comprehensible and relevant to visitors, simultaneously offering environments in which visitors can fulfill their own objectives unrelated to specific content. It can be difficult for a museum to effectively carry out this type of interpretation, but it is essential in order for the museum to achieve its full potential as a place of education, reflection, and inspiration.

Chapter 1

The Strengths and Shortcomings of Immersive History Sites

Living history museums, re-enactments of historic events, and historic house museums all offer unique encounters with the past. Using recreated environments, these types of museums often figuratively seek to transport visitors back to another era, and the extent to which visitors feel immersed in a historical time period is paramount to the effectiveness of such institutions. As defined by museum scholar Stephen Bitgood, an immersive museum experience is one in which the exhibit "effectively involves, absorbs, engrosses, or creates for visitors the experience of a particular time and place."[1] Under Bitgood's definition, immersive museum experiences involve such varied exhibit techniques as, for instance, dioramas, living history demonstrations, and re-created environments. In this study, "immersive history museums" will refer primarily to historic site museums and living history museums and programs, though the term can also include museum displays that make use of insular dioramas or demonstrations. Interpretation at immersive history sites raises many questions regarding authenticity in museums, the value of experiential learning, and the effectiveness of museums in fulfilling visitor needs. Critical examination of these types of institutions highlights their many strengths and weaknesses but undoubtedly assures their unique and essential role as both educational and recreational institutions.

[1] Stephen Bitgood, *Social Design in Museums: The Psychology of Visitor Studies*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc, 2011), 109.

Immersive History as Historical Fiction

In many ways, immersive history sites can be equated with works of historical fiction. Though historical fiction is rooted in scholars' research, creative authors blend this factual material with embellishment to make characters relatable, situations engaging, and storylines complete. The line between fact and fiction in such works is often unclear, yet historical fiction can impart a particular type of historical understanding that historians cannot as effectively address. British novelist William Thackeray held that "out of the fictitious book I get the expression of the life of the time – the old times live again. Can the heaviest historian do more for me?"[2] Historical fiction allows readers to "*feel* the past as formal history could not," thus intimately acquainting readers with historical characters and environments.[3]

Like historical fiction, immersive history sites offer visitors a very different type of encounter with the past than can be found in a book or classroom. Such sites "strive for what T. S. Eliot called 'felt-truth.' It challenges us to think *and* feel."[4] Like a work of historical fiction, immersive history addresses aspects of the past that are difficult to address in academic histories. These sites are "humanistic to the core" and allow visitors to "carry on a dialogue with the past."[5] Those who engage in living history re-enactments maintain "a deep curiosity about the *texture* of the past."[6]

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[2]David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 225.
[3] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 226.
[4] Jay Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984), 191.
[5] Anderson, *Time Machines, 79.*
[6] Anderson, *Time Machines,* 187.

These emphases on the "feel" and "texture" of the past as portrayed at immersive history sites speak to the fundamental uniqueness of these institutions. Living history museums offer "experiential modes of knowing – knowing directly through sight, sound, smell, touch, taste. The 'sense' we get is only an account of the past, to be sure. But it is a holistic sense . . ."[7] As such, immersive history sites should not focus solely on teaching visitors a body of facts about a particular topic. This is not where their strengths lie. In trying to fulfill only traditionally academic educational goals, immersive history sites fall short of their full potential to give visitors a different historical perspective than can be gained from books or classrooms. Museum professionals and historians alike must realize that "the most illuminating works of history are those governed by the most imaginative and capacious regulative fictions. The blurring of lines between history and fiction ought to humble historians, reminding them how fragmentary and oblique their view of the past must always be."[8]

Criticism of Immersive History Museums

Many museum critics, however, do not see the value of immersive history sites' representations of history. One of the most pervasive complaints about these museums is that they romanticize and idealize the past, sacrificing historical accuracy and cheapening history for the sake of entertainment. David Lowenthal, Professor Emeritus of geography at University College, London, terms the way in

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[7] Anderson, *Time Machines, 43.*
[8] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 236.

which historic site museums present history as "narcissistic nostalgia."[9] The sites primarily address positive aspects of history, emphasizing the moral fortitude, physical strength, and democratic principles of Americans from previous generations. In Lowenthal's view, these portrayals of the past are "less relevant to the actual past than to today's idealization of it."[10] Further, history at immersive museums is often made to be fun, incorporating participatory activities ranging from dressing up in period clothing to being "locked" into old-fashioned stocks for imagined transgressions. Such activities seem to make a mockery of the content they present by making a game out of a serious subject matter. Lowenthal concludes that "museumization alters what history is," removing historic buildings from their original contexts and interpreting them as idealized representations of a past that was not nearly as clean, peaceful, and principled as it is made to look in museum installations.[11]

Thomas J. Schlereth, Professor Emeritus of American Studies at Notre Dame University, asserts criticisms similar to Lowenthal's. Schlereth, too, maintains that immersive history sites tend to idealize the past and portray simplified views of history, creating linear narratives of progress that are "prejudiced to show only development, not decline."[12] Schlereth also points out that museums are highly interpretive ventures, picking and choosing both which information to present and how to present it. Unlike books with similar biases

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[9] David Lowenthal, "The American Way of History," *A Living History Reader* vol. 1, ed. Jay Anderson (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1991), 159.
[10] Lowenthal, "American Way of History," 159.
[11] Lowenthal, "American Way of History," 160.
[12] Thomas J. Schlereth, "It Wasn't That Simple," *A Living History Reader* vol. 1, ed. Jay Anderson (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1991), 165.

though, curators do not have the ability to insert footnotes and explanations of their interpretive decisions. Instead, visitors are led to believe that the museum's authority on its subject matter is definitive and the content it presents far more factual than it actually is.[13]

The inauthentic simplicity and romanticism of the content presented at immersive history sites is a popular complaint against this type of museum. National Park Service professionals Richard Sellers and Dwight Pithcaithley maintain a general wariness of living history interpretation due to its tendency to idealize the past. According to them, "reconstructed buildings only illustrate how the past may have looked not how it did look. Reconstructions are plagued, on the one hand, by insufficient data to allow a truly accurate reproduction and, on the other, by an almost unavoidable desire to beautify what was not always a beautiful past."[14] Other critics have called living history recreations "childish amusement" for a "gullible, history-hungry public."[15]

Architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable offers a scathing review of immersive history sites, focusing specifically on Colonial Williamsburg. To Huxtable, such institutions distort and cheapen history to an alarming degree. She posits the idea of "restoring back" historic buildings and landscapes to their previous appearance as "linguistic and conceptual crimes against art and history."[16] In this view, the preservation movement has destroyed rather than preserved America's built environment, replacing "reality with selective fantasy"

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[13] Schlereth, 167-168.
[14] Anderson, *Time Machines*, 59.
[15] Anderson, *Time Machines,* 65.
[16] Ada Louise Huxtable, "Inventing American Reality," *New York Review of Books,* 39, no. 20 (1992): 2.

by sanitizing and glorifying history in re-creations of historic sites.[17] Huxtable equates immersive history museums with institutions like Disneyland, claiming that both types of institutions have the same self-serving goals of cheapening history for the purpose of luring tourists into spending their money on "authentic" experiences and gift shop trinkets. Though historic site museums claim to be educational institutions based on thorough scholarship, Huxtable believes that the institutions "devalue what they teach; the intrinsic qualities of the real place are transformed and falsified" in re-creations that are selectively accurate in order to portray an overwhelmingly positive view of the past.[18]

These reservations illustrate an overall concern regarding the authenticity of immersive history sites. In the opinions of these critics, such sites fail to re-create the history they present with complete accuracy, and the liberties they take in interpreting their content negate any basis in scholarship. Critics address interpretation at immersive history sites as inherently flawed and severely lacking in educational value. These institutions bear inaccuracies that stem from romantic interpretations of the past, and thus they present a fictionalized view of history. These fictionalized views of history, critics seem to suggest, should have no place in historic education, and the museums that present them should change their interpretation policies to reflect a more academically accurate view of history.

Such critiques, though, fail to consider some key factors in their evaluations of immersive history sites. In order to clearly see the value of these types of museums, one must consider the fundamental uniqueness of immersive

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[17] Huxtable, 1.
[18] Huxtable, 3.

history sites as experiential museums, the ways in which the needs of museum visitors affect the museums' presentations of history, and the educational value in the goals and methodologies used in informal learning environments. Immersive history museums developed in an era that emphasized the educational value of "learning by doing," and they sought to popularize history by focusing on the everyday lives of common people. When developed, living history museums were vastly different from their elitist predecessors and sought to interact with the public in new and different ways. Today, such museums are still called upon to interact with their visitors in unique ways. Recent museum visitor studies suggest that museums can and should distance themselves from functioning as bastions of academic fact. Rather, they must embrace the various ways in which they are used by visitors, who may choose to use them as places of solace for present-day problems, as sites for meaningful family interactions, and as places that offer a general feel for the past rather than specific facts about it. In serving these visitor needs, museums can also serve as informal learning environments. The goals and methodologies of such environments are fundamentally different from those of formal learning found in classrooms and textbooks. Informal education emphasizes process over content in regards to learning; further, in immersive history sites, the process of learning should occur in ways that make visitors feel fulfilled, that enable them to have a good time, and that allow them to create general memories of an educational experience in a historic environment.

The History of American Museums

In order to fully understand the status of today's immersive history sites, it can be useful to place such institutions into the larger context of the history of American museums. In the mid-18th century, wealthy scholars began to develop collections known as "cabinets," which can be regarded as precursors to museums. Notable founders of early cabinets include a group of educated Philadelphians led by Benjamin Franklin and known as the Library Company, and a group of Harvard professors. The collections of such groups consisted of curiosities ranging from preserved animals to old coins to scientific equipment. These collections, though, were intended solely for the interest and edification of group members, not for the education of the general public.[19] Slowly, through the late 18th and early 19th centuries, cabinet societies began granting public access to their collections, and the idea of public museums began to take root. In the 1780s, both Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere and Charles Willson Peale, avid collectors of natural history specimens and art, opened their collections for public viewing, charging a small admission fee for the privilege.[20] Thus began the transformation of the American museum from an elitist enterprise to one of public enlightenment.

This major change in museums' intended audiences also caused a shift in institutional focus. Through the mid and late 19th century, museums became paternalistic institutions where wealthy and well-educated Americans sought to educate their lower-class brethren on the finer things in life and the lessons of morality to be learned from history. Institutions founded in the 1870s, such as the

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[19] Joel J. Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press,1990) 15-18.
[20] Orosz, 34-36, 44-45.

Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, professed a desire to help the public fully appreciate the aesthetics of great art.[21] Other institutions, such as George Washington's Mount Vernon home, became museums with the intent of educating the public on proper patriotism and good character. Mount Vernon relied heavily on Washington's quasi-religious place in American folklore to accomplish this aim. Early visitors to Mount Vernon often described their visits using religious terms, calling Mount Vernon "a shrine and hallowed place forever" and recalling a sense of being "awed into silence, for we believe the place where we are standing [the room in which Washington died] to be holy."[22] The women's group that ran Mount Vernon used "the sacredness of Washington's memory as means to preserve the virtue of the American Republic."[23] In this way, the educational objectives of institutions like Mount Vernon did not focus on historical events and interpretations, but rather on a moralistic education in which visitors' emotions were stirred and their devotion to traditional American ideals renewed.

In the early 20th century, museums in America began to focus a considerable amount of energy and time on educational programming. John Dewey's theories regarding the value of "learning by doing" influenced many museums in this regard. In 1915, the Cleveland Museum of Art was among the first to create a department with the express goal of running educational

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[21] Marjorie Schwarzer, *Riches, Rivals, Radicals: 100 Years of Museums in America* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2005), 9-10.
[22] Lee, Jean B., ed., *Experiencing Mount Vernon* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 200, 222.
[23] West, Patricia, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 37.

programs, and it hired one of Dewey's protégés to run the new department. Such educational departments created programs that brought artifacts into schools, offered story times for children, and conducted classes in topics like taxidermy.[24]

Immersive history sites that developed through the early and mid-20th century further tested the idea of "learning by doing." Based on Sweden's Skansen museum, an open air museum innovative for its village setting and its craft and folk life demonstrations, Americans in the early 20th century began creating period rooms and soon, period villages. George Francis Dow, secretary of the Essex Institute in Salem, Massachusetts, began experimenting with period room settings at the Institute in the early 20th century. In 1907, Dow created two such rooms, a kitchen set in 1750 and bedroom and parlor set in 1800; within six years, he had expanded the exhibit to include a number of distinct historic sites ranging from a shoemaker's shop to historic flower gardens.[25]

Notable early open-air museums that followed Dow's lead include John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia and Henry Ford's Greenfield Village in Michigan, which opened in 1932 and 1933, respectively. Colonial Williamsburg sought to recreate Virginia's colonial capital in full, giving visitors the chance to experience an authentically recreated atmosphere and, from that atmosphere, begin to understand the lives of colonial Americans.[26] Rockefeller was adamant about historic accuracy in every aspect of the recreated city, insisting that "no scholar must ever be able to come to us and say we have made a

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[24] Schwarzer, 12.
[25] Anderson, *Time Machines,* 25-28.
[26] Anderson, *Time Machines,* 30.

mistake."[27] In a similar way, Henry Ford created a living history village in Dearborn, Michigan, beginning the project in the mid-1920s and opening it to the public in 1933. Ford's endeavor focused on faithful restoration of buildings from a number of different eras in American history and, as a whole, strove to illustrate "the development of American arts, sciences, customs, and institutions by reproducing or re-enacting the conditions and circumstances of such development in a manner calculated to convey a realistic picture."[28] A case study of Ford's living history village will be explored in depth later on.

As living history programs took root, museums also began to focus on preserving and displaying objects related to everyday life, rather than those of the elite or the nationally important. For instance, the Historical American Buildings Survey, undertaken by Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal administration, focused on documentation and preservation of buildings that were "rooted in local memories and traditions" rather than those that illustrated the lives of illustrious and well-known individuals.[29] Henry Ford was at the forefront of a movement that sought to preserve everyday Americana, and his museum and living history village in Michigan included scores of farm tools, everyday clothing, and common books.

Though museums in the first half of the 20th century began to focus on the stories of everyday people, the stories of minority populations were still largely ignored. This began to change in the 1960s, as museums struggled to maintain relevance to a society in which minority issues rose to the top of public

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[27] Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The new History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 34.
[28] Anderson, *Time Machines,* 28.
[29] Jill Liddington, "What is Public History? Publics and Their Pasts, Meanings and Practices" *Oral History,* 30, no. 1 (2002): 86.

consciousness. In this era, museums began to view themselves as akin to community centers that, according to community activist John R. Kinard, could serve as "catalyst[s] for social change."[30] Museums that addressed the stories and needs of specific ethnic groups were first created in this era and included institutions such as the Wing Luke Asian Museum in Seattle and El Museo del Barrio in East Harlem.[31] At this time, living history museums also began to make an effort to become more inclusive, presenting histories of minority populations that had been previously ignored; for instance, Colonial Williamsburg began interpretive programs that addressed slave life in 18th century Virginia.[32]

By the 1970s, the museum field began to professionalize. In this era, historians developed the term "public history" to describe what museum professionals did every day—presenting history outside the field of traditional academia.[33] Throughout the latter part of the 20th century and early part of the 21st century, museums expanded their missions to include goals that reached beyond simply teaching scholarly content to visitors. In this era, museums' function shifted from that of a static "temple," imposing authoritarian visitor education, to a more appealing "forum," encouraging experiential visitor learning and engaging discussion. Museums gave up some of their authority in favor of presenting a plurality of views and encouraging visitors to make their own interpretations of the content on display. In the words of museum scholar Stephen

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[30] Schwarzer, 21.
[31] Schwarzer, 21.
[32] Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 23.
[33] Liddington, 85.

Weil, museums shifted from "being *about* something to being *for* somebody."[34] In this way, museums sought to "refashion themselves from bastions of remote culture into social centers and community hubs."[35]

Over the past two centuries, museums have therefore transitioned from paternalistic, educational temples to participatory public forums for discussions of issues, past and present. Vestiges of the phases in between remain, contributing to the complex identities of today's museums. These organizations blend aspects of their history to fashion themselves as scholarly, elite, moralizing, educational, fun, pluralistic, and experiential institutions. With such a complex history, today's museum must try to fulfill a considerable number of goals at the same time, as it strives to maintain a high level of scholarship while catering to community needs and educating the public at large. Immersive history sites keenly experience demands to be educational, fun, historically accurate, and much more all at once. The origins of these various demands are evident in the different phases of American museums' history, and many of these demands create conflicting pressures that affect the museum's interpretative strategies and overall mission.

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[34] Stephen Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Books, 2002), 28.
[35] Schwarzer, 23-25; Gloria Goodale, "Museums' New Mantra: Connect with Community" Christian Science Monitor, July 21, 2009, www.csmonitor.com/2009/0721/p17s01-algn.html (accessed September 17, 2011).

Contemporary Conceptions of the Past

Public ideologies regarding history are also important to understand when studying the ways in which museums, visitors, and history interact. Though it is difficult to make generalizations about how entire populations find meaning in histories that can be both collective and personal, David Lowenthal has done a great deal of research on the subject and has formulated a number of convincing arguments regarding public conceptions of history. According to Lowenthal, for many people, looking to the past offers comfort and solace from the ever-increasing demands of a busy, modern world.[36] In many ways, the study of the past functions as an escape from unpleasant aspects of the present.[37] Further, in interviewing re-enactors and other historic enthusiasts, researcher Jay Anderson found that such individuals maintained a desire to "escape from the present into the timeless world of the past."[38] Here, history enthusiasts are able to gain some distance from a modern world in which "time is money, and success is measured by the speed with which a job is done."[39]

The benefits of "escaping" to a different time in history stem from a fundamental image of the past as simpler, purer, slower-paced, or somehow inherently superior to the present. Though, in many cases, this view in and of itself is overly simplified and contrived, escapism cannot be negated as a motivation for seeking interaction with history. Even if the past to which a museum visitor yearns to "escape" is to some degree idealized, such idealism is

[36] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* xv.
[37] Lowenthal, *ForeignCountry,* 49.
[38] Anderson, *Time Machines,* 185.
[39] Anderson, *Time Machines,* 183.

an integral part of the visitor's view of history and must be taken into account when considering how the past is understood by today's society.

Fundamentally, views of the past as a place of tranquil escape arise from feelings of nostalgia for previous eras. In the 17th century, nostalgia was regarded as a disease, and reports of death following pangs of longing for one's past or homeland gave dire physical consequences to a mental state. Even into the 20th century, nostalgia was regarded as a dangerous physical condition.[40] As such, intense feelings of nostalgia have been an important part of the human experience for centuries. As defined by David Lowenthal, nostalgia is "memory with the pain removed."[41] Nostalgic regard for the past represents disenchantment with the present and fear of the future. Rather than address the unpleasant aspects of contemporary life or deal with the uncertainty of the future, people would rather escape to a past that, if not entirely perfect, is at least known. And from what is known about the past, it can be made near perfect in the mind's eye.[42]

Nostalgic regard for the past is a major factor in movements to preserve historic items and buildings. As modern life changes at an ever-quickening pace, new technologies make reality from the science fiction of just decades ago with, for instance, innovations such as video chatting and GPS technology. Further, according to educator Karl Fisch, the top ten jobs of 2010 did not even exist in 2004, and some predict that by 2049, computers will exist that have greater computational abilities than the entire human species.[43] With profound changes

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[40] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country* 10-11.
[41] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 8.
[42] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 11-12.
[43] Karl Fisch, "Did You Know? 3.0" 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3cfmS6dmfd0.

happening and happening quickly, people today are likely to feel disconnected from a past (even a recent past) that bears little resemblance to what they are accustomed to in the present.[44] Thus, the quick pace of change often gives rise to efforts to preserve a past that is viewed as fleeting at best, and people actively recognize "the necessity [of] a sense of continuity in change."[45]

Interpretation and Authenticity

Because preservation of the past is often motivated by feelings of nostalgia, such feelings often also affect the ways in which history is interpreted by museums and historic sites. Oftentimes, it is easy to see these nostalgic biases when looking at museums in hindsight; the benefit of time and distance from interpretive decisions highlights the ways in which they represent adherence to outdated sensibilities or ideologies.[46] Additionally, as critics are quick to point out, nostalgic biases are present in contemporary interpretations of the past. In addressing the effects of such biases on historic authenticity, critics of both past and present bias in historic interpretation often hold on to a misconception that by "exposing lies and expunging fabrications, [one can] secure historical fidelity against villainous manipulators, [and] . . . regain the 'true' past."[47] At its core, this view asserts that it is possible to attain a truly unbiased and pure vision of what the past looked and felt like. However, this view is inherently flawed

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[44] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 389.
[45] Anthony Brandt, "A Short Natural History of Nostalgia," *A Living History Reader* vol. 1, ed. Jay Anderson (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1991), 205; Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 399.
[46] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 325.
[47] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 327.

because, in examining history, “we are one of its inescapable terms. The past cannot be known except in relation to ourselves.”[48] Because of this, the ways in which the past is understood and represented will always be tinged with a measure of present-day bias, often as manifested in nostalgic views of the past.[49]

The elusiveness of definitive historic truth, though, does not invalidate the pursuit of historical knowledge. To use Lowenthal’s analogy, “the curtain of doubt does not cordon off historians from the past; they look through the fabric and beyond, secure in the knowledge they approximate the truth.”[50] The fact that interpretations of history are influenced by nostalgia and other biases cannot be judged as good or bad; it is simply an inevitable aspect of the study of history. Failure to recognize the inevitability of this bias begets a “self-defeating insistence on a fixed and stable past” that cannot ever really be fully known.[51] Present-day alteration of the past is, to some extent, both inevitable and necessary for history to remain relevant, as “only by altering and adding to what we save does our heritage remain real, alive, and comprehensible.”[52]

Despite the nature of history as inevitably colored by its contemporary interpretation, immersive history sites invariably emphasize their own historical accuracy. Indiana’s Conner Prairie living history village assures visitors that “every visit is a unique adventure that provides an *authentic look* into the history that shapes us today.”[53] Old Sturbridge Village in Sturbridge, Massachusetts

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[48] Brandt, 205.
[49] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 216.
[50] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 235.
[51] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 411.
[52] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 411.
[53] Conner Prairie, “Who We Are,” http://www.connerprairie.org/About-Us/Who-We-Are/History-Of-Conner-Prairie.aspx. emphasis added.

states that its museum campus consists of "more than 40 original buildings, each carefully researched [and] restored," in a setting where, today, "authentically costumed staff…carry out the daily activities of an early 19th century community."[54] Colonial Williamsburg, a benchmark in living history interpretation, self-describes itself as including "scores of original buildings, hundreds of homes, shops and public buildings…rare animal breeds, trades, and gardens add *layers of authenticity* to the re-created town."[55]

In museum settings, the idea of historical authenticity is particularly complex. Here, adherence to the tenets of scholarship and the achievement of full historical "accuracy" are institutional goals both for educational and reputational reasons. According to Eric Gable and Richard Handler, researchers in Colonial Williamsburg, this institution and others like it regard a reputation for historical accuracy as a "credibility armor" of sorts. By paying attention to the tiniest details in the staff's period clothing, the settings inside historic buildings, and the plants in historic gardens, such institutions uphold reputations for a high level of historic scholarship.[56] This reputation helps the museums to respond to critics like Huxtable and Schlereth, touting accuracy as historians criticize institutions that they view as more akin to theme parks than beneficial learning environments.

In focusing heavily on establishing full authenticity, immersive history sites perpetuate their own negative assessment by scholars. The museums inevitably "represent theories—that is, generalizations—about the past. As in any

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[54] Old Sturbridge Village, "Our Museum," http://www.osv.org/museum/index.html.
[55] Colonial Williamsburg, "What to See and Do," http://www.colonialwilliamsburg.com/visit/whatToSeeAndDo/index.cfm. emphasis added.
[56] Handler and Gable, 44-48.

historical account, they are based on incomplete evidence. They are subjective, as any 'model' produced in the arts, humanities, or science."[57] Like any interpretation of the past, these museums bear present-day and nostalgic biases that make full accuracy impossible to achieve. These barriers to authenticity, though, are not necessarily detrimental to the museum's effectiveness. In fact, these limitations make immersive history sites particularly able to serve visitor needs and function effectively as informal education centers set in generally historic atmospheres.

Visitor Needs in Museum Settings

By studying visitors and their motivations for going to museums, immersive history sites can learn how to fulfill visitors' needs in ways that make use of the institutions' strengths and downplay their weaknesses. According to museum researcher John Falk, by and large, museum visitors are far less concerned with the details of content on display than museum professionals think. Instead, the museum visitor experience includes a blend of both content and non-content related components, and effective visits are achieved when both components are addressed. A museum's factual content is not nearly as striking to a visitor as is the overall experience of visiting the museum. Potential museum guests are influenced far more by word-of-mouth recommendations about the positive experiences of previous visitors, than by marketing materials that

[57] Anderson, *Time Machines,* 43.

emphasize the scope and breadth of the museum's collections. Most people visit museums as a leisure activity that is both fun and fulfilling in a personal way.[58]

According to Falk, a museum visit is often a manifestation of a particular aspect of the visitor's identity. Falk splits visitors into five general categories based on their identity-related motivations for museum visits: Facilitators, Experience Seekers, Rechargers, Explorers, and Professionals/Hobbyists. Based on these basic categories, Falk asserts that the goals most visitors enter the museum with have little to do with the expressed content or educational goals of the institution. Facilitators visit museums for the benefit of someone other than themselves, such as children, significant others, or visiting relatives/friends; their primary goals revolve around having meaningful social interactions with these people while learning some of the museum's content along the way. Experience Seekers are those visitors who approach the museum with the intent of "checking it off the list" of life experiences, so to speak. These visitors seek to create memories of an overall experience at the institution. Rechargers view museums as tranquil places in which they can reflect on their own lives and gain a personal sense of peace.[59]

The motivations of Explorers and Professionals/Hobbyists in visiting a museum include an interest in the institution's content. As inherently curious individuals, Explorers seek to discover new knowledge about the museum's subject matter. These individuals usually want to actively engage with the museum's content, learning through a process of personal discovery rather than

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[58] John H. Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009), 26, 186, 43.
[59] Falk, 89, 195-205.

being spoon-fed information. Professionals/Hobbyists are scholars in the museum's subject and visit with the intent of expanding their own knowledge or gaining new insight from unique presentations of familiar information; these individuals represent the smallest percentage of museum visitors. Though the goals of Explorers and Professionals/Hobbyists are related to the museum's content, visitors in these categories also focus a considerable amount of attention on the overall experience of learning in the museum and on the museum's methodologies in teaching its content. [60]

For Facilitators, Experience Seekers, and Rechargers, the museum's content has little to do with motivation for visiting. Consequently, learning the museum's expressed educational objectives will have little effect on whether or not the visitor feels that his or her visit was successful. For instance, if a visitor enters the museum hoping to have meaningful social interactions with a relative, the visit will be considered a failure if an interpreter presents a long lecture about mid-19th century farming techniques, preventing discussion between the visitors. In such an instance, though the visitors may come away with minds full of new facts about ploughs, crops, and livestock, the exchange represents fulfillment of the museum's goals for visitors, rather than the visitors' goals for themselves.

According to Falk's research, museum visitors generally do not seek deep knowledge about a museum's content area as a major part of their visit. Rather, visitors seek to spend their leisure time in a way that makes them feel fulfilled, and, in most cases, learning detailed information about the museum's content is

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[60] Falk, 199-201, 219.

not integral to visitors' sense of fulfillment.[61] Oftentimes, however, exhibits and experiences designed by curators and museum professionals do not take these visitor goals into account; instead, they address only institutional goals. Museum researcher John A. Veverka found it surprising "how few people had spent any time thinking about what the visitors wanted. We were more concerned in planning programs that we-the interpreters-were interested in."[62] In examining programs and exhibitions that seemed to be well-designed, Veverka wondered, "are we giving the answers to questions that nobody is asking?"[63]

Veverka's research and that of other museum professionals indicates that, yes, museums often offer experiences and information that do not effectively capture visitors' interest. In his research at an outdoor government park site, Veverka found that most visitors wanted to use the site primarily for recreation, and interpretive programs, such as slide presentations and educational hikes, were largely ineffective because they focused too heavily on didactic goals. When "fun" was emphasized more in advertising for such programs, attendance increased.[64]

Staff at Massachusetts's Old Sturbridge Village undertook visitor studies that showed findings similar to those of Veverka. Museum staff found that visitors were "not really using us as a place to wrestle with the questions of history, but with the issues of today."[65] Research indicated that, in order to have a

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[61] Falk, 245, 43.
[62] John A. Veverka, *Interpretive Master Planning,* vol. 1, *Strategies for the New Millennium* (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc, 2011), 86.
[63] Veverka, 76.
[64] Veverka, 89.
[65] B. Paynter, "Personal Connections" unpublished lecture notes, American Association for State and Local History conference, 2007, 6.

fulfilling experience, visitors "don't need to make connections in any way to the big ideas that are our focus." Instead, visitors seemed to be "interested in a fairly generalized sense of the past; a pre-modern, largely pre-industrial, rural, agricultural, small community, bucolic world, and they like visiting this world through the framework of a historic village."[66] Again, the museum's focus on its own educational goals pre-empted interest in the ways in which visitors preferred to use and experience the museum.

This research is not to suggest that museums lack educational merit because visitors' demands that have little to do with educational content. Rather, it suggests that in order to be effective educational institutions, museums must "meet visitors where they are" and frame educational goals in ways that complement how visitors themselves want to experience the museum. This type of focus does not in any way cheapen the institutions or their content; rather, it represents a way of presenting history that is simply different from traditional book or classroom methods.

Historical knowledge as acquired through museums should not be judged by the same standards that apply to formal methods of learning. According to Handler and Gable, in a museum, "teaching history to the public is a social encounter with rules of its own."[67] These rules are dictated by the fact that visitors' own goals in a museum visit are largely unrelated to the museum's content. Because of this, the most effective way to convey historical knowledge to visitors at immersive history sites is to evoke a general feeling and atmosphere

[66] Paynter, 3-4.
[67] Handler and Gable, 13.

of the museum's era of interpretation. In most cases, this will mean emphasizing detailed historical accuracy less and the "big picture" impression of an era and its inhabitants more.

Informal Education

Offering a general impression of a historical era can be considered a mode of informal education. Informal learning seeks to create self-directed learning experiences; in museums, this takes the form of exhibitions and programs that visitors observe and participate in, choosing for themselves which programs to attend, which exhibition labels to read, and how much time to spend at the museum. In formal learning environments such as classrooms, an instructor sets the pace of lessons, and learning activities are highly structured and standardized. In rewarding learners for achieving educational goals, formal education settings utilize "contrived rewards," such as grades, while informal learning makes use of "natural, intrinsic rewards," such as "satisfying curiosity [or] engaging in a fun or interesting activity."[68]

For reasons such as these, informal learning environments differ greatly from formal education settings. Though very different, neither method can be regarded as inherently more beneficial than the other. Rather, each can be used effectively for different purposes. Informal education is most effective in providing stimulating experiences that give general information about a broad content area. Formal education is most effective in teaching large quantities of

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[68] Stephen Bitgood, *Social Design in Museums: The Psychology of Visitor Studies* (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc, 2011), 1: 91-102.

information on a single topic. This setting is particularly appropriate for this type of education because it allows for content to be repeated until it has been learned. In an informal setting such as a museum, though, repetition of information is generally not feasible. Learners in these settings are able to interact with the information presented only briefly, and, in general, museums "cannot delve into any specific topic with attention to detail."[69]

The characteristics of informal learning centers dovetail nicely with the capabilities of immersive history sites and the expectations visitors have for them. As discussed previously, museum visitors generally come to museums with goals that revolve around their own identity-related needs. Therefore, visitors will tend to seek museum experiences that are social, fun, tranquil, or inspirational rather than experiences that greatly increase their knowledge of a particular subject area. As John Falk observes, learning in museums is generally more about the process of learning than the content that is learned.[70]

Learning experiences in museums include a number of different facets that make them unique and effective. Learning in a museum "is usually a social event where visitors exchange information."[71] Unlike formal learning environments, where peer discussion among learners is discouraged, informal learning draws upon social interaction as a way of actively engaging visitors with content. Additionally, informal learning, particularly in a museum setting, is focused on experiences rather than facts. By giving visitors quality experiences with

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[69] Bitgood, *Social Design,* vol. 1, 95, 104-107.
[70] Falk, 57.
[71] Bitgood, *Social Design,* vol. 1, 100.

historical topics and information, museums offer visitors the opportunity to have fun while also being exposed to historical content.[72]

Immersive history sites focus heavily on the value of experiences as effective teaching tools. In touring a re-created environment or actively participating in a historical demonstration, visitors gain a different type of knowledge than is typically found in the context of formal education. This type of informal education does not emphasize "the acquisition of facts, concepts, etc., [instead] a more pervasive understanding of the subject matter is sought--one that includes the feelings of experiencing another time and/or place, curiosity, excitement, etc."[73] Studies of visitors' recollections of immersive exhibits indicate that sensory experiences and exposure to objects are far more likely to be remembered than factual information given in text panels.[74] In remembering the smell of bread baking in a living history farmhouse or the way a mid-19th century schoolhouse is arranged, visitors gain a unique type of knowledge; this knowledge may not match what can be learned by engaging in formal education, but this is entirely acceptable and even positive given that the two types of learning are fundamentally different. In museums, "it is hoped that the immersion environment enhances the vividness and meaningfulness of 'book learning' associated with the experience."[75]

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[72] Bitgood, *Social Design,* vol. 1, 103.
[73] Bitgood, *Social Design,* vol. 2, 131.
[74] Bitgood, *Social Design,* vol. 2, 160-165.
[75] Bitgood, *Social Design,* vol. 2, 110.

Creative License in Immersive History Sites

As discussed thus far, museum visitors generally go to museums seeking to fulfill identity-related, rather than strictly educational, objectives. At the same time, museums offer experiences through which visitors can engage in informal learning. In order to fulfill both the museum's educational goals and the visitor's identity-related goals, museums must blend their scholarship with a visitor-focused approach to the interpretation of history. As addressed by John Falk, museums cannot simply give visitors what they want or what they need; both must be blended and balanced to create an environment in which learning and personal fulfillment can thrive.[76]

In order to fulfill the objectives of both museums and their visitors, immersive history sites can, to some degree, creatively interpret history. As previously discussed, museums can be seen as akin to historical fiction, maintaining a basis in scholarship in conjunction with creative embellishment or abridgement as necessary. According to David Lowenthal, altered history is valuable in its own way, as it is better for people to engage in "a lighthearted dalliance with the past than a wholesale rejection of it."[77] Bitgood asserts that in museum settings, "visitors will not learn if they don't pay attention to the interpretive devices."[78] On a grander scale, visitors also will not learn if they cease paying attention to museums entirely based on a conception that the institutions do not fulfill visitor needs.

[76] Falk, 239.
[77] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 408.
[78] Bitgood, *Social Design,* vol. 1, 35.

If an immersive history site can create a memorable experience for a visitor and generate interest in its subject matter, it has been effective. According to museum theorist Freeman Tilden, "the chief aim of interpretation is provocation, not instruction."[79] Museum interpretation should inspire visitors to think about the ideas presented and ask questions, both of the museum and of themselves, making the content personal and relevant to their own lives and interests. In this view, slight alterations of historical content are permissible in order to get and keep visitors' attention, help them to fulfill their own objectives, and offer general historical information in the process. In the same vein, Lowenthal asserts that: "historical narrative is not a portrait of what happened, but a story about what happened."[80] As such, estimating historical accuracy for the sake of telling a coherent story and keeping visitors' interest is entirely acceptable. Based on Falk's study, museums cannot and should not try to dictate what benefits visitors will reap from their visit. Instead, museums must accept that visitors arrive with their own goals, and if the museum can help them to achieve these goals, whether they are related to the museum's content or not, so much the better for both museum and visitor.[81]

Based on the unique nature of museums as educational and recreational institutions, alterations to historical content in museum settings are necessary for a number of reasons. First, oftentimes, historical content may need to be altered, abridged, or adorned in order to make it interesting enough for visitors to watch. As told by a National Park spokesman, "you can't reenact a siege. Everybody

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[79] Qtd. in Veverka, 12.
[80] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 215.
[81] Falk, 243.

would get bored and go home."[82] For reasons such as this, condensing an event or embellishing it with characters drawn from research but colored with imaginative detail can be acceptable and effective ways to interpret history.

Additionally, by altering buildings or artifacts, visitors can often more readily make sense of them. For instance, oftentimes, architectural ruins are "made more comprehensible by lowering ground surfaces, heightening walls, revealing buried details" and removing "subsequent additions that 'confuse' the scene." In making such alterations, interpreters ensure that visitors who are not experts in the subject matter will be able to easily make sense of the artifacts or ruins before them.[83]

Visitors to historic site museums arrive with certain expectations in regards to cleanliness and visitor service. Oftentimes, visitors become uncomfortable when historic buildings are authentically unkempt or individuals accurately ill-mannered. Plimoth Plantation was met with adverse results when the institution attempted a higher level of authenticity by portraying Pilgrim interpreters as dirty and ragged. A visiting professor of American Civilization "found it vulgar, tasteless, and dirty. [Plimoth Plantation] will give the museum field a bad name if it gets any more popular."[84] Similarly, in a bout of extreme authenticity, Nova Scotia's historic Louisbourg Fortress "offended tourists with [militiamen's] rumpled uniforms and rude ways."[85] At Greenfield Village in Michigan, visitors were disgruntled by authentic weed growth near a late 19th

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[82] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 296.
[83] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 271-273.
[84] Anderson, *Time Machines,* 61.
[85] Lowenthal, *Foreign Country,* 298.

century machine shop, and the museum received several letters of complaint about what was seen as lazy maintenance.[86] In all of these instances, visitors were distracted by the gritty realism of the museum environment. Rather than making an impression about the realities of hygiene and building upkeep in historical eras, these situations offended visitors and made them uncomfortable, detracting from their experiences and distracting them from other educational content.

While alterations to historical content can be necessary and beneficial in order for museums to achieve their full potential as informal learning centers, these alterations cannot be undertaken to the extent of fully ignoring any aspect of history. Immersive history museums have often been accused of not dealing appropriately with minority populations and controversial issues, focusing too heavily on "great white men."[87] To some extent, such assessments are accurate; before the latter half of the 20th century, many museums hardly addressed minority issues or the implications of atrocities like slavery and genocide. Throughout the early 20th century, history and museums were often used to Americanize recent immigrants, teaching traditional values as seen in celebratory interpretations of the past, and their collections reflected this focus.[88] In the later decades of the 20th century, when museums began shifting their attention towards minority populations, they found that they often lacked the collections to tell the stories of individuals other than "great white men."[89] Though collections and focuses have been growing and shifting in the past several decades, immersive

[86] Jeanine Head-Miller, Curator of Domestic Life, The Henry Ford, and Donna Braden, Curator/Experience Developer, The Henry Ford, interview with author, 10 November 2011.
[87] Schlereth, 163.
[88] Wallace, 8.
[89] Schwarzer, 24.

history museums often still struggle to effectively address minority issues, and they must frequently field contemporary criticism for their shortcomings.

While minority populations and the unpleasant aspects of their treatment throughout history cannot be ignored in museums, these aspects can be generalized and simplified, as is other historical content presented in museums. As discussed previously, the process of learning in a museum is more meaningful and memorable than specific factual content. Thus, to most effectively address minority issues that have previously lacked due consideration, museums can offer visitors a generalized sense of the experiences of these groups. This does not downplay the importance of these stories; it allows for them to be presented in a way that is most conducive to learning in the museum, that is, in a generalized and simplified format.

In generalizing historical content for the sake of meaningful presentation, museums must be very careful about the way they address the idea of authenticity to visitors. When conducting research in Colonial Williamsburg, Handler and Gable found that the institution did not place enough emphasis on the ways in which it altered history in order to present it to visitors. Rather, Williamsburg focused on telling visitors that its stories and representations were based on the highest scholarship and resulted from "an objective and disinterested search for the past 'as it really was.'"[90] Like all living history museums, though, Handler and Gable found that Williamsburg had changed its interpretation of themes, buildings, and individuals based on an "ever-changing historical sensibility that is a product *of the present, not the past,*" making Williamsburg far less "authentic"

[90] Handler and Gable, 222.

than it claimed to be.[91] Other museum researchers have made similar observations, asserting that: "we need even to be able to communicate to [visitors] how *we* manipulate reality by our presentations – by our juxtapositions, by our hierarchies, by our own opinions being represented as fact."[92] Museums must be completely honest about these inherent biases and those introduced for the purpose of clarifying historical context, maintaining visitors' interest, or ensuring that visitors' varying needs are met. By making their own interpretation process more transparent, museums can effectively fulfill both their own goals and those that visitors bring with them to the museum.

By blending these two sets of goals, immersive history sites can maintain relevance in the 21st century and remain vital for both educational and recreational purposes. The mission of these museums cannot be purely didactic or purely entertaining, but instead must blend both to fulfill institutional and visitor-based needs. Further, these institutions must fully accept and admit that they cannot attain perfect accuracy in their representations of history. In recognizing their own shortcomings and embracing their strengths, immersive history sites can connect visitors to the past in experiential ways, offering impressions of the past and environments in which individuals can explore and fulfill their own identities. As stated by an insightful museum professional from Massachusetts's Old Sturbridge Village, "it is about hearing what people need in their world, seeing how they already use our museums, and then drawing on the richness of history,

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[91] Handler and Gable, 223.
[92] Selma Holo and Mari-Tere Alvarez, *Beyond the Turnstile: Making the Case for Museums and Sustainable Values* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2009), 138.

and the depth of historical institutions to find historically based ways to meet those needs."[93]

The tension between authenticity and historic alteration is not without precedent. Museum founders in the past century and beyond have grappled with similar issues. By looking at some of their struggles and the ways in which they ultimately chose to interpret historical content, contemporary museum professionals can gain insight regarding interpretation methodologies at museums today. The Henry Ford and Museums of Old York, two American museums founded in the early 20th century, provide particularly apt case studies for this subject.

[93] Paynter, 4.

Chapter 2

History, Nostalgia, and Education in Henry Ford's Greenfield Village

Today, The Henry Ford identifies itself as "America's Greatest History Attraction." The institution's namesake and founder would likely approve of this tagline. From the time of the museum's creation, it has functioned as a multi-faceted institution maintaining a heavy focus on education and the value of learning by doing. The museum's campus consists of a number of historic and educational attractions, including Greenfield Village, Henry Ford Museum, the Ford Rouge Factory Tour, and an IMAX theater. Originally known as the Edison Institute, The Henry Ford was created in 1929 and at that time consisted of Henry Ford Museum, a sprawling indoor museum displaying artifacts ranging from farming equipment to furniture, and Greenfield Village, an outdoor living history village. Today, Greenfield Village consists of over 100 historic buildings, most of which were put in place by Henry Ford from the 1920s through the 1940s. As a nationally significant institution, Greenfield Village includes a large number of historic buildings that reflect both national and local trends and events. The institution includes craftsmen's shops, the home of Noah Webster, the Wright Brothers' childhood home, a courthouse where Abraham Lincoln practiced law, a memorial reconstruction of George Washington Carver's birthplace, Ford's own birthplace, Thomas Edison's Menlo Park laboratory complex, and a 17th century English Cotswold cottage, among many others. The buildings are arranged on a network of streets through which horse drawn wagons transport visitors to various

areas of the Village's ninety acres. By examining the way Ford chose to construct and use Greenfield Village, today's visitors and museum professionals can better understand the institution's potential as an effective venue of informal education.

Visiting the Village

Greenfield Village opened to the public in 1933, before Ford even regarded it as completed. The project had been in progress since the late 1920s, and its reputation quickly reached far across the country. By the early 1930s, over 1,000 people a day came to Dearborn to see Henry Ford's historical project. Though Ford granted special permission for some groups to tour with guides before the museum was technically open to the public, the sheer number of curious visitors by 1933 required a new approach.

When Greenfield Village opened to the public, admission was twenty-five cents for adults and ten for children; school groups received free admission. Upon entering the Village, visitors were greeted with the quaint panorama of a bustling little town. Accounts of Village visits throughout the 1930s, from special visitors before the grand opening and the general public after, emphasize the Village's old-fashioned atmosphere. One 1930 article from *The Dearbornite* reflects that the Village's chapel with its tall white steeple "gives a quiet and peaceful atmosphere to the green and will doubtless prove a genuine haven of rest to visitors during their pilgrimage through the centuries as represented by the Museum and Village."[94] Another article entitled "Back Roll the Years"

[94] "Henry Ford Unfolds Living American History," *The Dearbornite*, September 1930, 6. BFRC: Acc. EI 232, Box 1.

emphasizes the immersive atmosphere of the Village. Upon arrival at different locations throughout the Village, the article's author states that "the years rolled back" to each building's time period, and at the end of the journey, the author reminds his readers that "no, it wasn't a dream—just a most thrilling visit to Henry Ford's Greenfield Village."[95] A 1934 article appearing in the *Times-Picayune New Orleans* also highlights the sentimental feel of Greenfield Village. The author describes Ford's project as an epic poem of American history, which Ford authored "with wood and stone, earth and steel." This poem is one that "scores of thousands of Americans come to study every year. They go back home with swelling hearts and throats in which a slight choke needs swallowing."[96]

Besides leaving visitors with a warm, fuzzy sense of the virtues of yesteryear, Greenfield Village also fulfilled many didactic objectives. Information distributed to visitors, both verbally and in print, contained countless facts about the history of buildings in the Village and their significance to history at large. For instance, a 1930 "Guide to Historical Village of Greenfield" published in *The Dearbornite* describes Cotswold Cottage as an example of "a distinctive style of small home architecture [that] was developed about 1550 to 1700 . . . The roofs are shingled with slate. Oak timbers support the roofs . . ."[97] A booklet distributed to visitors in the Menlo Park complex pointed out original artifacts in the building and listed the inventions Edison crafted there.[98]

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[95] Bobbie Leslie, "Back Roll the Years," *Long Lines,* December 1931, 24-25. BFRC: VF, Henry Ford (Organization)
[96] Meigs O. Frost, "Greenfield Village Bares Americanism of Henry Ford," *Times-Picayune New Orleans States,* 29 July 1934, Page B-Two. BFRC: VF, Henry Ford (Organization)
[97] "Guide to Historical Village of Greenfield," *The Dearbornite*, November-December 1930. BFRC: VF, Henry Ford (Organization).
[98] Guide to Menlo Park, Edison Institute, Dearborn, MI, 1934. BFRC: EI 143, Box 1.

Ford and History

Though Ford's specific impetus for creating Greenfield Village is difficult to determine definitively, tracking the evolution of Ford's historical sensibilities sheds light on the institution's conception and construction. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, Ford repeatedly asserted a disregard for the value of history, stating in 1916, for instance, "what do we care what they did five hundred or one thousand years ago? It means nothing to me. History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker's dam is the history we make today."[99] Ford reiterated this seeming contempt for the past in a statement to *Metropolitan Magazine* the same year, stating that "I don't know anything about history, and I wouldn't give a nickel for all the history in the world…I don't want to live in the past. I want to live in the Now."[100]

Ford's feelings about history received widespread attention in 1919. During a libel trial against the Chicago *Tribune*, lawyers quizzed a clueless Ford on basic facts from American history. Unable to answer most of the questions correctly, Ford's exasperation led him to once again deny the value of history, saying that history "never served me very much purpose."[101]

The embarrassment of the trial seems to have served as a catalyst in spurring Ford to action in his historical pursuits. Ernest G. Liebold, one of Ford's

[99] Stephen Watts, *The People's Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century,* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 422.
[100] Watts, *People's Tycoon,* 422.
[101] Watts, *People's Tycoon,* 422.

secretaries, remembered that immediately after the trial, Ford began to mull over the idea to create a museum. The new museum would display "what actually existed in years gone by and . . . show the actual development of American industry from the earliest days that we can recollect up to the present day." Most importantly, Ford was adamant that history as presented in his future museum "won't be bunk!"[102]

Ford's early assertions of history's worthlessness did not apply to all studies of the past. Rather than writing off history in total, Ford maintained that the subject as taught in schools and written about in books lacked essential content. Traditional historians focused their classes and writings on individuals like politicians and events like wars and revolutions, failing to address the realities of life for everyday people of the past. Ford regarded the subjects of these traditional studies as "unusual phases of our national life," and because history focused on such topics, Americans knew "hardly anything about the life of that earlier America which produced them."[103] Ford saw this as highly problematic. In his estimation, "our country has depended more on harrows than on guns or speeches," yet historians rarely addressed commonplace agricultural practices like harrowing. By ignoring the everyday aspects of the past, history lost essential relevance to the present. Ford summed up these views in a 1932 article, stating that: "I thought that a history which excluded harrows, and all the rest of daily life, was bunk. And I think so yet."[104]

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[102] "The Reminiscences of E.G. Liebold," Volume II, January 1953, 890. BFRC: Acc. 65.
[103] Henry Ford, "The Idea Behind Greenfield Village," *The American Legion Monthly,* October 1932, 7. BFRC: VF, Henry Ford (Organization).
[104] Ford, "Idea Behind Greenfield," 7.

In Ford's opinion, the real truth and value in history came from understanding the everyday lives of one's ancestors. According to one of Ford's close aides, Ford was "very enthusiastic about bringing to the attention of the present generation the development of the past, in mechanics, different little trades, how men made shoes, how men made barrels, how men made horseshoes, and iron materials, things out of iron, wood, and machine shops."[105] Additionally, Ford felt that by understanding the past, more progress could be made into the future. He saw the passage of time as a continuum of progress and innovation, believing that every generation "improved on the past."[106] In short, Ford felt that "the farther you look back, the farther you can look ahead."[107] To Ford, this evolution of progress was the true value of history.

Ford's views regarding the importance and significance of history made his museum a unique endeavor, as he sought to recreate a general sense of historical progress, focusing on technological developments and the ways they affected the lives of everyday Americans. From the museum's conception, Ford never wanted to teach visitors the kinds of facts they would find in history books. Instead, he wanted to offer them a broad view of history that would inspire their actions in the present and future, giving only a general sense of the past.

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[105] "The Reminiscences of Mr. Edward J. Cutler," Vol. 1, March 1952, 24. BFRC: Acc. 65.
[106] Charles B. Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age,* vol. 1 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981)*,* 79.
[107] William Adams Simonds, *Henry Ford and Greenfield Village* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1938), 14.

Ford and Object-Based Learning

In keeping with his aim to present history by using untraditional methods, Ford's village focused very heavily on the educational merits of object-based and interactive learning. Ford regarded artifacts and demonstrations as far more effective teachers than professors and books. In describing the project to a potential collaborator in 1928, Ford's secretary asserted that "Mr. Ford dislikes mere 'dead' exhibitions of things; he wishes to see them in action in their proper setting."[108] Ford argued for the value of a living history village, maintaining that here, "even the unimaginative visitor can reconstruct how the people cooked their meals, he can see for himself the rope-spring beds and the trundle beds on which they and their children slept, he can see their method of using the candle molds with which they made their evenings less completely dark."[109] Additionally, the Village's demonstrations of historic craftsmanship and industry would allow visitors to better understand the past and its modes of production.

Not only did Ford see immense value in historic recreation, but he also staunchly believed that close examination of objects from the past provided a wealth of historic information. As he acquired thousands of artifacts ranging from antique toasters to steam engines, Ford maintained that: "I do not collect antiques as such. I am collecting the history of our people as written into the things their hands made and used."[110] Authors wrote with biased agendas, argued Ford, but artifacts could not lie; they provided objective, truthful historical

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[108] Letter from Frank Campsall to James W. Bishop, 27 September 1928. BFRC: EI 114, Box 4.
[109] Ford, "Idea Behind Greenfield", 7.
[110] J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, "The Ford Museum," *The American Historical Review,* July 1931, 773. BFRC: VF, Henry Ford (Organization).

records. Some viewed Ford as gifted for his ability to tease meaning from objects and find in a "little old worn out device" an "eloquent, faithful and true . . . story of its times."[111] In Ford's estimation, "reading" objects was the most effective way to learn about history, and his vast collections of artifacts illustrate an unwavering commitment to this idea.

Though Ford was correct in asserting that artifacts themselves hold no bias, he failed to recognize that, by interpreting artifacts, some measure of bias is necessarily imposed on them. As previously addressed, it is impossible to completely erase present-day sensibilities from interpretations of history. The presentation of history in museums and other educational institutions inevitably includes some bias in both the initial selection of stories to be told, and in the methodologies used to tell these stories. As is the case for many museum creators, Ford often did not recognize the ways that his own ideologies affected his historical narrative. However, in many cases, these oversights were relatively benign and served the purpose of creating a generally historic atmosphere in which visitors could both learn and spend their time enjoyably.

Despite his biases, Ford was correct in his belief that artifacts can be used to tell compelling stories of history. Complex historical concepts become easier to understand when accompanied by tangible examples that visitors can examine and with which they can interact.[112] For instance, in a museum, visitors can come face to face with a 19th century train, seeing where its coal was stored and

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[111] Henry A. Haigh, "Henry Ford's Typical Early Village," *Michigan History,* Summer 1929, 542. BFRC: EI 232, Box 1.
[112] Stephen Bitgood, *Social Design in Museums: The Psychology of Visitor Studies*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc, 2011), 97.

shoveled into boilers, examining the complicated mechanisms that made the train run, and gaining a better understanding of how such a huge, powerful piece of machinery could play an integral role in a transportation revolution. The addition of interactive components and moving pieces makes museum exhibits even more compelling, attracting more visitor attention than static displays.[113] So, if a museum train runs, it is likely to pique visitors' interest, allowing them to hear the train's many moving parts swish and whir, smell its burning coal, and create an experiential memory that offers a unique kind of historical understanding.

Ford's Collections

Ford's enthusiasm for collecting the material culture of years past first surfaced in 1914. Watching homeward-bound schoolchildren one day, Mrs. Ford remarked to her husband, "Hear the children gaily shout, 'Half past four and school is out,'" a rhyme both seemed to recall from the McGuffey Reader textbooks they had used in elementary school. After trying unsuccessfully to remember the second half of the poem, the Fords searched their home for a McGuffey Reader. When the search did not yield a useful tome, Ford scoured antique stores for a book to provide the elusive last two lines of the poem. Once he began acquiring McGuffey Readers, though, he soon couldn't stop, and over the next several years, he collected close to 500 copies.[114]

From the McGuffey Readers, Ford's collecting interests grew to include a wide range of other items. In the beginning, much of this interest centered on

[113] Bitgood, *Social Design,* 45.
[114] William Greenleaf, *From These Humble Beginnings: The Early Philanthropies of Henry and Edsel Ford, 1911-1936* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964), 73.

items associated with his personal past. Fred L. Black, one of Ford's secretaries, describes this as a ripple effect beginning with "an effort to find the furniture and things they'd had around his birthplace. [From there] his interest in furniture broadened, and led into farm machinery of that period. His interest gradually broadened more, until he was interested in much earlier periods. That was really the basis of the interest that finally grew into the Museum."[115]

The collecting bug hit Ford hard. He acquired artifacts ranging from spinning wheels to stoves and carriages to coffee roasters. The growing collection was originally housed in Ford's office and moved into Building 13 of the company's tractor plant as space became available.[116] Here, Ford preserved countless items of Americana, creating a material record of the nation's everyday life. At a time when most collectors focused on the greats of European art or the most illustrious figures in history, Ford acquired "hundreds of thousands of pieces which no one else would bother holding."[117] No inkwell, shoe, or clock was too lowly for Ford's attention.

To acquire this vast array of antiques, Ford employed the help of antiques dealers, as well as Ford employees from around the country. He himself was known to frequent antique stores, and, according to one aide, "would walk around

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[115] Fred L. Black Oral History Draft, March 1951, 56. BFRC: Acc. 65.

[116] Geoffrey C. Upward, *A Home for Our Heritage: The Building and Growth of Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum, 1929-1979* (Dearborn, MI: The Henry Ford Museum Press, 1979), 3.

[117] Samuel Crowther, "Henry Ford's Village of Yesterday," *Ladies Home Journal*, September 1928, 10. BFRC: VF, Henry Ford (Organization).

and say 'I want this, I want that.' And before he got through, we'd have a carload out of that doggone place with no reference to price at all."[118]

Ford's collecting habits grew out of his personal interests and tastes. As such, the collection falls into four major categories: pieces pertaining to family history, items associated with Ford's heroes, objects that illustrate industrial progress, and everyday artifacts. Each category represents an emotional touchstone for Ford and, from these, his collections grew.

Ford's nostalgia for his own past inspired him to collect objects of familial importance. Though Ford himself would never confess to being a sentimentalist, his wife was known to call him "one of the most sentimental men that ever lived."[119] Ford's vast collection of McGuffey readers served as small reminders of the simplicity of his childhood, and they represented a tangible reclamation of younger days. In writing a 1929 article for *The Mentor,* Ruth Kedzie Wood identified another group of particularly sentimental artifacts. When touring Ford's collection in Building 13, Wood stumbled upon fifty pairs of sleigh bells hanging on the wall in a storage building; Ford had acquired the bells in an extensive search of a pair that jingled with the same tone as those worn by his father's horses.[120]

In addition to items of familial importance, Ford also acquired objects associated with his personal heroes, which included individuals such as Thomas Edison, the Wright Brothers, and Abraham Lincoln. Like Ford, these men

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[118] Qtd. in Watts, *People's Tycoon,* 405.
[119] Greenleaf, *From These Beginnings,* 74.
[120] Ruth Kedzie Wood, "Henry Ford's Greatest Gift to the American People," *The Mentor*, June 1929, 10. BFRC: VF, Henry Ford (Organization).

reached revered stations in life through hard work and perseverance; they had not been born rich, famous, or even privileged. Black points out similarities between Lincoln and Ford, saying about the former, "here is a man who came from very humble beginnings, as did Henry Ford; a man who, through his own efforts, made a place for himself in history…[and] reached the top through his own efforts."[121] Essential characteristics of Ford's heroes, therefore, included lifetimes of hard work, risk-taking, and eventual achievement of long sought-after goals. These stories typified fulfillment of the traditional American dream; through perseverance and hard work, any typical farmer or factory worker could achieve nationally acclaimed success and change the way thousands of people lived their lives. Ford told the stories of his heroes through the buildings that they lived and worked in, including the Wright Brothers' childhood home and the bicycle shop where they developed their airplane, a courthouse where Abraham Lincoln practiced law in Illinois, and a variety of laboratories and other buildings related to Thomas Edison.

Ford's collecting habits also included objects that showed industrial progress. As a lifelong tinkerer, Ford often felt special connections to these types of objects. According to William J. Cameron, an aide and public relations staff member, a collection of machines was "like a library to him. He could read in an old machine what the man had, what idea he had when he started it, what he had to work with."[122] Ford himself believed that "there's beauty in machinery, too. A

[121] Black, Oral History Draft, 39.
[122] Watts, *People's Tycoon,* 407-408.

machine that has been run fifteen years tells its own story."[123] These personal feelings of connection and respect for machinery enticed Ford to collect many mechanical objects ranging from steam engines to pocket watches.

A vast portion of Ford's collection consisted of objects associated with everyday life of years past. When touring Ford's facilities in 1929, Ruth Kedzie Wood was apparently very impressed with the scope of Ford's collection of everyday Americana, taking nearly an entire paragraph in her article "Henry Ford's Greatest Gift to the American People" to list a number of the items in storage. Among them were "scores of styles of crude hearth tools . . . half a hundred spinning wheels stand[ing] rim to rim…cookie molds, early schoolbooks, pipes, spectacles, fans…clocks of every shape and maker…"[124] Samuel Crowther, a Ford biographer, toured Ford's collections and concluded that: "Mr. Ford has at least one specimen of every kind of shoe or boot ever worn in this country."[125] Though this was perhaps a slight exaggeration, Wood corroborates the gist of the statement with her own findings, reporting that Ford's collection included "rows of shoes, some of them taken from cobbler shops where they had lain for near a century ('Have you any copper-toed boots?' we asked and were promptly shown two pairs, one with red tops)."[126] Ford was adamant about the focus of his collection, wanting to keep it "strictly American" and focused on the common people of the nation.[127]

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[123] Watts, *People's Tycoon,* 408.
[124] Ruth Kedzie Wood, "Ford's Greatest Gift," 9-10.
[125] Samuel Crowther, "Henry Ford's Village of Yesterday," *Ladies Home Journal,* September 1928, 10.
[126] Ruth Kedzie Wood, "Ford's Greatest Gift," 10.
[127] William L. Stidger, "Ford Explains His 'Curio Shop' of America," *Detroit Times,* 26 February 1928, 1. BFRC: VF, Henry Ford (Organization).

Ford's regard for everyday objects largely stemmed from his nostalgic feelings for the past. Ford regarded Americans from the previous two centuries as particularly impressive in their work ethic, morality, and lifestyles. In a 1926 article in *Garden and Home Builder,* Ford asserted that "I deeply admire the men who founded this country, and I think we ought to know more about them and how they lived and the force and courage they had."[128] Again, in a 1932 article appearing in the *American Legion Monthly*, Ford expressed a similar sentiment, saying that: "we must not lose sight of the real values of that older life in the earlier days of our country."[129] In newspaper articles from the 1920s, Ford asserted a disdain for fast-paced city life, instead stating that: "in small communities the better qualities of our nature have a chance."[130] Ford believed so firmly in the strength and fortitude possessed by Americans of previous generations that he regarded the "pioneer spirit" as "the most valuable asset which America possesses."[131]

The emotional touchstones that served as the basis for Ford's collection speak to the highly emotive, nostalgic nature of his museum. The common thread that runs through all of Ford's collections is nostalgia; whether the objects represented Ford's personal history, that of individuals he revered, a recounting of progress, or the everyday life of the good old days, his regard for the past was tinged with nostalgia. Ford viewed history as a narrative of progress, and he held

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[128] Henry Ford, *Garden and Home Builder*, July 1926, 433. BFRC: VF, Henry Ford (Organization).
[129] Ford, "Idea Behind Greenfield Village," 7.
[130] Watts, *People's Tycoon,* 425.
[131] Gladys H. Kelsey, "America's Yesterdays Brought to Life," *Detroit Saturday Night*, 15 March 1930. BFRC: EI 232, Box 1.

the past in high regard for the ways in which it was seemingly simpler and more wholesome than his present. This nostalgia was manifested in various ways throughout the Village, sometimes serving to create generally historic atmospheres and sometimes spurring attempts at extreme historical accuracy, as will be addressed in later sections of this chapter.

Creating Greenfield Village

With a vast collection of Americana amassed, the thought of creating a museum and living history village began to solidify in Ford's mind. Though he had been collecting for years already, the first public mention of plans for a museum appeared in 1925. This plan mentioned only the potential construction of "an ample fire-proof structure of stone and steel" to display the vast collections.[132] The first public announcement of a living history village appeared in a 1928 *Ladies Home Journal* article by Samuel Crowther, though the plan had been in the works for a few years prior. Fred Black remembered Ford's selection of the Village's location in the mid-1920s.[133] Close to both Ford's home and office in Dearborn, the location made the Village easily accessible.

In many ways, working at the Village functioned as Ford's escape from the struggles of modern life. As the number of buildings being brought to the Village increased, so did his attention to the project. Though Black was, for a time, the nominal director of the institution, he quickly learned that "the real director was Henry Ford…We fitted our planning for exhibits, and the

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[132] Henry A. Haigh, "The Ford Collections at Dearborn," 1925, 20. BFRC: EI 232, Box 1.
[133] Black, Oral History Draft, 54.

interpretation of those exhibits, to carry out what he might want."[134] Ford made decisions on every last detail in the Village and would ensure that his orders were carried out to the letter. His employees quickly learned that "it was much easier to have a complete understanding with him originally than to tear something down and re-do it" when he disapproved.[135]

Ford was in his element working on his historical pursuits. When encouraged to finish up the project in a timely manner and open it up to the public, Ford replied, "oh, no, I don't want to hurry up and get that done. If I get that done, I'll never have anything to do on this earth. When you don't have anything to do, then you're ready to die."[136] Ford seemed to prefer historical pursuits to automotive ones, often joking to Edward J. Cutler, the Village's architect, "I guess I'll have to leave you now, and go and make some more money for us to spend down here."[137] The Village was Ford's pet project, and he gave it his attention whenever possible. For years, Cutler's office lacked a telephone in order to prevent Ford Motor Company executives from contacting Ford while he was working with Cutler. Ford responded to Cutler's repeated requests for a telephone with a firm "no," admonishing him to "forget that stuff. I came down here to get away from that gang."[138] Based on his boss's attention to the Village, Cutler concluded that: "the pressures of Mr. Ford's work were relieved by the work in Greenfield Village."[139] The project provided an escape to a time Ford

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[134] Black Oral History Draft, 54.
[135] Black, Oral History Draft, 66.
[136] Upward, *Home for Our Heritage,* 75.
[137] Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age*, 86.
[138] Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age*, 86.
[139] Watts, *People's Tycoon,* 413.

viewed as a golden age, making the Village one of his favorite places to spend time.

Because Ford used Greenfield Village largely as a place to rejuvenate and to reflect on his present in light of the past, he created an atmosphere that was conducive to this type of activity. Though the Village includes buildings from a number of different time periods and places, they are arranged as a single town unit, with a "main street" of shops, shady lane of houses, and village green bookended by a chapel and town hall. Preservation scholar Charles Hosmer speculates that visitors "instinctively enjoy the curious groupings of ordinary buildings in the village because these structures 'work' in the scheme; they mean something to everyone."[140] Jeanine Head-Miller and Donna Braden, contemporary curators at Greenfield Village, observe that many visitors arrive at the Village needing a respite from their everyday lives, and the institution is often able to provide this for them.[141] As addressed in Chapter 1, visitors often come to museums with goals that are largely unrelated to the museum's content, and by helping visitors to fulfill these goals, both the museum and the visitors stand to benefit. Greenfield Village's atmosphere and its use as a respite for both Ford and for museum visitors speaks to the effectiveness of the institution in providing for these personal needs.

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[140] Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age,* 97.
[141] Jeanine Head-Miller and Donna Braden, interview with author, November 10, 2011.

Nostalgia and Education in Greenfield Village

Despite his nostalgic biases, Ford repeatedly asserted the educational value of his budding institution, maintaining that "its purpose is serious, not sentimental," as he had "not spent twenty-five years making these collections simply to bring a homesick tear to sentimental eyes."[142] Ford sought to offer educational opportunities by replicating life from the past, and his project aimed to "reproduce American life and preserve in actual working form at least a part of our history and our tradition."[143] In addition, Ford's new institution had the very specific purpose of educating the public about the history of their forefathers and the progress that had been wrought through their hard work. To Ford, history meant progress, and by recounting changes occurring through the passage of time, one could see the discoveries and improvements made.[144]

Even as a proclaimed educational institution, sentimentality permeated the visitor experience at Greenfield Village. Because Ford so highly valued the pioneer spirit, much of the Village sought to convey a high regard for the "good old days." An early guidebook for the institution asserted that "the pioneer past was not indulgent with its people, but it did make self-reliant men and women who could largely fend for themselves in good times and bad."[145] Another handbook, published in 1935, encouraged visitors to soak in the historic

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[142] Ford, *Idea Behind Greenfield,* 8.
[143] Hamilton, "The Ford Museum,", 772.
[144] Watts, *People's Tycoon,* 403.
[145] Greenleaf, *From These Beginnings,* 92.

experiences available at the Village because it was "worthwhile to observe how our ancestors groped their way from the primitive to enlightenment."[146]

These simplified views of history present educational goals heavily influenced by sentimentalism. Rather than directly address controversial or negative parts of history, Ford sought to show only the positive aspects of the past. In focusing only on this positive progress, Ford sometimes left out aspects of history that he found distressing; for instance, he generally did not collect pieces of weaponry, aside from those used for hunting. As a staunch pacifist, Ford "never . . . liked the idea of taking human life and he thinks it as well to forget the things with which killing was done."[147] By leaving out some such grittier aspects of history, in many ways Ford created an idealized view of the past.

As addressed in Chapter 1, completely ignoring aspects of history that are unpleasant or distressing represents an extreme form of historical alteration. Failure to even acknowledge violent or oppressive episodes from the past, such as wars, genocides, or enslavement, does a disservice to historical understanding, falsifying facts for the sake of idealization. In order to understand a historical time period even generally, its unpleasant aspects cannot be ignored.

In some cases, Ford's treatment of history did indeed ignore certain topics and issues. As originally built, Greenfield Village included very minimal, if any, content regarding minority groups such as Native Americans and African Americans. These groups are most noticeably absent from the Village because

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[146] Watts, *People's Tycoon* ,424.
[147] Haigh, "Ford Collections at Dearborn," 16.

much of the institution addresses time periods in which the majority of American society actively oppressed these groups. While Ford's shortcomings in his failure to adequately address these aspects of history is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that there is a distinct difference between idealized and generalized portrayals of history. Where this study advocates for the use of generalized conceptions of history in immersive history museums, it does not call for widespread idealization at the expense of ignoring segments of history. While nostalgia can in some cases motivate this type of unhealthy idealization, in other cases, it can serve to create generally historic atmospheres in which visitors can learn about themselves and engage in informal education about historical content. Ford's nostalgic biases in Greenfield Village often fall into the latter category, as manifested in his restorations of the Ford Homestead, Thomas Edison's Menlo Park complex, and the Cotswold Cottage.

Ford Homestead Restoration

In 1919, road construction threatened to destroy Ford's boyhood home, standing in Springwells Township, Michigan. Unable to stand idly by as the home of his youth succumbed to the wrecking ball, Ford took action to save the old building, ordering it moved 200 feet to distance it from the new road's path. After moving the house, Ford began work restoring it to reflect 1876, the year his mother died when Ford was just a boy of thirteen. As his first restorative measure, Ford re-erected a windmill next to the house, enlisting an able Ford Motor Company draftsman to plan and oversee its construction. After

successfully designing the windmill, Edward J. Cutler became the primary historic preservation architect for the development of Greenfield Village throughout the next several years.[148]

Restoration of the Ford homestead continued over the next seven years. In this time, Ford conducted archaeological digs around the premises of the house and searched nationwide for specific items he remembered from his childhood. According to a 1956 interview with Cutler, Ford's intent was to "furnish it as near like what it was" as possible.[149] To this end, Ford relied on archaeological evidence, his own memory, and the recollections of his brothers and sisters. As Fred Black, recalled, "everything they found, nails and pieces of dishes and what have you, was brought to [Ford], and he would recognize or show them to his brothers and sisters. They'd agree that, yes, they remembered this. In that way, he was able to find the design of the dishes they had. As a result, he was able to have them reproduced."[150]

In some cases, Ford was adamant about very specific accuracy in the house's restoration. For instance, Ford would not allow the dining room to house just any antique stove. He remembered a Starlight Model 25 stove, and he would not rest until he found this specific make and model. The search was perpetually on his mind; while driving through eastern Michigan with his son Edsel in 1920, Ford stopped the car to dig a promising stove from its partial grave of sand on the

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[148] Upward, *A Home for Our Heritage,* 8; Jeanine Head Miller, Judith E. Endelman, Donna R Braden, and Nancy Villa Bryk, *Telling America's Story: A History of The Henry Ford* (Virginia Beach: Donning Company Publishers, 2010), 33.
[149] Edward J. Cutler, Interview with Kenneth Metcalf, Gerald Gibson, and George Bird, 15 June 1956, 19. BFRC: EI 186, Box A13-A-3.
[150] Black, Oral History Draft, 55.

side of the road. When it turned out to be the wrong model, Ford left it where it lay and continued his search. Eventually, he found his precious Starlight Model 25 rusting on a porch in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Ford bought the stove from the homeowners, who were undoubtedly surprised by his strange request, then he personally dismantled the piece and transported it back to Dearborn in the trunk of his car. [151]

Though Ford was incredibly thorough in some parts of the homestead's recreation, other aspects were treated more generally. For instance, according to Cutler a corner cabinet that hadn't been in the original house was added "because [Ford] wanted it, and we built it to suit him." Similarly, Cutler added an anachronistic fireplace to the sitting room, working with Ford through multiple designs before settling on one that suited him.[152] Cutler also remembered Ford and his wife, Clara, personally arranging and rearranging items in the house, describing their enjoyment of the process and stating that "they played with that thing for a long time."[153]

Though one of his first preservation projects, the homestead was the last building Ford oversaw moving into Greenfield Village. Until that time, he treated the building as a personal plaything. According to Roy Schumann, a Ford carpenter, "in '24 or '25 he had a dance party in [the homestead's] barn on Halloween night. He had it decorated all up with corn stalks and everything like that, and he even put heat in the barn. We put radiators in there, and we sat out back of the barn, firing the steam engine to furnish steam for the radiators while

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[151] Greenleaf, *From These Beginnings,* 76.
[152] Cutler Interview, 15 June 1956, 13-14.
[153] Cutler Interview, 15 June 1956, 19.

they had the dance in the barn. I believe that was about one of the first dances he had of the old-time square dances."[154] In other instances, Ford used the home as his own private space to relax and rejuvenate, cooking meals in the kitchen where his mother had toiled, and tinkering with watches in his old bedroom. Edsel, his wife, and their children sometimes participated in the family patriarch's nostalgic adventures, gathering at the homestead for old-fashioned Sunday dinners.[155]

Indeed, nostalgia played a large role in Ford's restoration of his childhood home. The very personal subject of the project undoubtedly influenced Ford in the restoration, particularly when archaeological digs around the original site turned up items of special meaning. For instance, excavators once uncovered a pair of rusty skates that had belonged to Ford in his younger years; Black recalled his boss's "great delight" at finding the skates, concluding that "I don't think he could have been given anything in the world that would have pleased him quite as much as those old, rusty skates."[156]

Restoration of the Ford homestead represents an effective blend of factual accuracy and nostalgic regard for the past. By combining these two methods of historical inquiry, Ford created a historic atmosphere; the homestead was neither a minutely accurate re-assemblage of objects, nor a contrived representation a past that never existed. Instead, the project used historically accurate elements to create an environment in which visitors could gain a glimpse of Ford's personal history, and reflect on their own pasts and the meaning of "home." As addressed in Chapter 1, the use of creative license to create generally historic atmospheres

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[154] Upward, *Home for Our Heritage,* 8.
[155] Greenleaf, *From These Beginnings,* 76.
[156] Black, Oral History Draft, 56.

stands to benefit both museums and visitors, helping each to achieve goals for museum visits, whether directly related to the museum's content or not.

Menlo Park Restoration

Ford's desire for historical accuracy was manifested most intensely in projects pertaining to Thomas Edison. Ford and Edison maintained a close friendship throughout much of their lives, and Ford revered Edison for his scientific genius and the success he achieved through perseverance and hard work. To honor his idol and friend, Ford collected memorabilia, large and small, related to the famous inventor. Most notably, Ford recreated Edison's Menlo Park laboratory complex in Greenfield Village. Ford took special care with this pet project, careful to make it as historically accurate as possible.

When Ford began the Menlo Park project in 1928, only foundations of Edison's buildings remained in New Jersey. Blueprints had to be made from the clues offered by these foundations and the recollections of Edison and his staff. Re-creation efforts relied heavily on facts supplied by Francis Jehl, one of Edison's former employees. In conjunction with these memories, the project also relied on archaeological evidence uncovered at the site. Ford employed a team of workers to sift through the ground surrounding the buildings' former site, and the search revealed, among other things, Edison's own mortar and pestle.[157] According to William Simonds, one of Ford's aides, "all was carefully gathered together and shipped to Dearborn, even the broken bottles and shards."[158] Liebold

[157] Upward, *Home for Our Heritage,* 33-37; Cutler, "Reminiscences," 20.
[158] Simonds, *Henry Ford and Greenfield Village*, 122.

elaborated on this point, recalling that: "later there was a glass case erected in the yard, which contained all of the things they had recovered from the excavation."[159] Ford even joked that: "we took everything but the climate."[160]

Once all the material from New Jersey was brought back to Dearborn, crews set to work rebuilding the Menlo Park complex according to the exact specifications of the original site. Ford purchased bricks for the building project from the company that had produced the bricks originally used in New Jersey, and "after the structure had been built, [he] placed a single slat from the [only remaining] original shutter in each of those shading the windows of the new office-library."[161] The streets surrounding the Menlo Park complex within Greenfield Village were named for those in New Jersey, and the buildings themselves were arranged in relation to one another exactly as they had originally stood. In order to recreate the interior spaces of the buildings, Ford contacted the chemical supply company Edison had used decades before. Referencing old receipts, the company was able to sell Ford the same chemicals that had been present in the lab while Edison worked on his inventions there.[162] To make the recreation complete, Ford even brought seven boxcars of New Jersey soil for the buildings to rest on.[163]

When it came time to unveil the finished product, Edison was full of praise for the accuracy with which Ford had managed to recreate the Menlo Park

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[159] Liebold "Reminiscences," 938.
[160] Qtd. in Greenleaf, *From These Beginnings,* 102.
[161] Simonds, *Henry Ford and Greenfield Vilage,*123-124.
[162] "Guide to Historical Village of Greenfield," 28; Head Miller et al., *Telling America's Story,* 40.
[163] Upward, *Home for Our Heritage,* 37.

complex. After looking around the entire premises, he contended that the job was 99.9% perfect; the only complaint he had was that "our floor was never as clean as this."[164] Later, while discussing a carpenter Edison had worked with in his Menlo Park days, the inventor told his companions that the man had lived over in Metuchen, accompanying the statement with a gesture towards where Metuchen lay in relation to the old laboratory as it stood in New Jersey. The recreation was so accurate that Edison felt for a moment as though he really was back in his old lab decades before.[165]

Ford took incredible pains to ensure the historical accuracy of the Menlo Park complex. However, it is questionable whether this scholarly accuracy was indeed the best way for visitors to Menlo Park to learn about Thomas Edison and his inventions. As addressed by Handler and Gable in Colonial Williamsburg, when immersive history museums focus too heavily on portraying "just the facts," they often obscure their own educational objectives. In such cases, the pursuit of total "accuracy" usurps the potential for personal and critical interaction with historical concepts.[166]

Early guidebooks distributed to visitors in Menlo Park focused on the minute accuracy of details in the recreation. A 1934 booklet pointed out many original items in the buildings, made note of recreated items that were carefully placed in their original locations, and emphasized the overall accuracy of the re-creation. The guidebook paid less attention to helping visitors understand

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[164] Simonds, *Henry Ford and Greenfield Village,* 135.
[165] Simonds, *Henry Ford and Greenfield Village,*138.
[166] Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The new History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 92-93.

Edison's scientific research methodologies and the ways that his inventions worked. [167] As such, visitors to Menlo Park likely came away with an appreciation for Ford's attentiveness to detail in the Menlo Park recreation, but what of appreciation and understanding for Edison and his inventions? In many ways, it seems that obsession with accuracy pre-empted opportunities to educate visitors about Edison and his inventions in ways that would be meaningful, memorable, and thought-provoking.

Unfortunately, no early visitor studies exist that can speak to the ways in which visitors learned from the Menlo Park complex. Based on the more recent and general visitor studies addressed in Chapter 1, though, it is reasonable to assume that visitors to Menlo Park likely did not remember specific factual material presented in the buildings. Instead, they likely came away with a general sense of what Edison's labs looked like, and an appreciation for the detailed accuracy of the installation. This appreciation for accuracy, though, says more about Ford and his deep respect for Edison than about Edison himself and his achievements. As such, it seems that Ford's attention to accuracy in Menlo Park likely did not achieve his own educational goals pertaining to experiential and object-based learning. Where visitors stood to gain little historic insight from walking over New Jersey soil to a completely accurate re-creation of Menlo Park, perhaps they could have gained more from walking over Michigan soil into a generally historic atmosphere that allowed them hands-on access to re-creations of Edison's inventions. Though, in allowing hands-on access, perhaps the

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[167] Guide to Menlo Park, Edison Institute, Dearborn, MI, 1934.

buildings could not be set up to reflect Edison's occupancy with complete accuracy, sacrifice of historic accuracy could offer visitors more beneficial opportunities for informal education.

Cotswold Cottage Restoration

Just a few Greenfield Village blocks away from Menlo Park stands Cotswold Cottage, an English stone house dating from the 17th century. The building seems rather out of place in Ford's early American village; Ford, though, argued for its relevance, holding that the building illustrated the type of home many early immigrants to America left behind when moving across the Atlantic Ocean.[168]

As Ernest Liebold recalled the acquisition of Cotswold Cottage, Ford simply "saw these homes and decided he wanted one in the Village so one was purchased and torn down . . . and re-erected in Dearborn."[169] The process, though, was not quite that simple. Once a suitable cottage was identified and purchased, Ford faced a number of options for alterations to make the home more accurate to its early 17th century appearance. The building consisted of two cottages attached to one another, and Ford's agents identified "Cottage No. 1" as the "least altered and most interesting" of the two.[170] These agents provided a number of restoration options for Ford to choose from. Most of these options consisted of adding various stereotypically Cotswold features, such as dormers

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[168] Black, Oral History Draft, 68.
[169] Liebold, "Reminiscences," 925.
[170] Herbert Morton, Cotswold Cottage Report, Herbert Morton, 11 June 1929. BFRC: EI 186, Box A13-A-6.

and porches, to Cottage No. 1 and leaving Cottage No. 2 intact in England to be sold later. The final option presented "an alternative, a modification of both cottages."[171] All of these plans aimed at making the cottage into an example of typical 17th century British architecture.

Ford chose the final option of leaving the two structures together and introducing modifications to make the buildings more representative of the 17th century Cotswold style. Workmen added a dormer, porch, and bay window to Cottage No. 1 and an ornamental door head to Cottage No. 2, using these stereotypically 17th century architectural features to make the building more "accurate" to the era Ford wished to portray.[172] With Ford's approval, the entire building was dismantled and shipped to Dearborn. There, Cutler, Ford's workmen, and English artisans reconstructed the building.[173] Ford brought the English artisans as experts to assist in reconstruction efforts, but, for Cutler, these helpers turned out to be a hindrance. The British workers were familiar with "working one wall and then working another wall, both by themselves;" American construction techniques, though, did not follow the same methods, and so the British workers "were lost. They stood around. That was about all they could do."[174] Thus, most of the reconstruction efforts fell on Cutler and his men.

Ford's restoration of Cotswold Cottage illustrates an attempt to create a generally historic atmosphere, rather than a completely accurate representation of a past era. In this recreation, Ford was happy to use a building that was not

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[171] Morton, Cotswold Report.
[172] Letter from Herbert Morton to Frank Campsall, 7 October 1929. BFRC: VF, Henry Ford (Organization).
[173] Upward, *Home for Our Heritage,* 82.
[174] Cutler, "Reminiscences," 43-44.

entirely "accurate" and introduce changes to make it a generalized reflection of the era he wished to portray. In creating this general 17th century Cotswold atmosphere, Ford also introduced animals to the site.

Liebold remembered Ford coming to him after the Cottage was rebuilt and saying, "now we've got the Cotswold Cottage there, but it won't be complete unless we've got a good Newfoundland dog" to herd the Cotswold sheep on the premises.[175] And so, Liebold contacted a Canadian breeder to purchase a dog that was "supposed to be the best strain of Newfoundland dog."[176] In addition to a dog on the premises, doves were also essential to the historic ambiance of the Cotswold complex. Cutler recalled that the doves were meant to nest in holes in the side of the buildings, but they refused to do so. Rather than forfeit the doves entirely, Cutler and his crew instead "had to build them a house." Though a dovecote was not part of the original complex as it stood in England, Cutler tried to make the building as period appropriate as possible, and he conceded that the finished product was "a nice addition" to the overall area.[177]

In his re-creation of Cotswold Cottage, Ford did not strive for the kind of accuracy that characterized his Menlo Park or Ford Homestead projects. Instead, he created a generalized sense of a historic era and did not seem concerned with achieving strict historical accuracy. Cotswold Cottage provided visitors with a general sense of what a 17th century Cotswold home might have looked like. The home itself was altered, but the alterations served to make the building into a readily understandable representation of a particular era. As addressed in Chapter

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[175] Upward, *Home for Our Heritage,* 83; Liebold, "Reminiscences," 925.
[176] Liebold, "Reminiscences," 925.
[177] Cutler, "Reminiscences," 45.

1, in the context of museum education, this type of alteration serves to enhance the visitor experience by making content and concepts easy to grasp. From Ford's Cotswold Cottage re-creation, perhaps visitors could gain a sense of what it would be like to live in a stone house in an agrarian setting hundreds of years ago, making generalized comparisons between the types of homes common in England during the 17th century and those in America as seen in other parts of the Village. By provoking visitors to experience this general sense of history and reflect on what life was like in a time and place long ago and far away, the Cotswold Cottage re-creation stood to effectively serve as an instrument of informal education in the Village.

Ford's Legacy in Greenfield Village

In Greenfield Village, Ford sought to create a museum where visitors could experience a historical atmosphere and learn about the everyday people of the past. For their era, the goals and the methodologies of Greenfield Village were relatively new. Before 1950, standards for historic preservation were virtually nonexistent, and the movement "operated almost entirely by instinct."[178] Ford was one of the first notable preservationists to focus on seemingly banal artifacts and buildings, and his living history village was among the first of its kind in America. Ford did not employ traditional historians to help run his museum; instead, he used his own judgment and the help of Ford Motor Company staff to obtain artifacts and reconstruct buildings.[179] Though the lack of

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[178] Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age,* 1044.
[179] Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age,* 75, 83.

experience among Greenfield Village's staff may not have been entirely advisable, the make-up of the staff is telling of Ford's intentions for Greenfield Village. Ford did not want history in Greenfield Village to be told as it was by traditional scholars, and so he refrained from involving any of these scholars in the project. Instead, he used Greenfield Village to experiment in creating an environment of informal education, blending nostalgic and scholastic approaches into a unique atmosphere conducive to both learning and enjoyment. In doing so, Ford left today's museum professionals with the opportunity to use the Village and its environment in ways that fulfill the goals of both the museum and its visitors.

Chapter 3

Fact vs. Fiction in the Historical Projects of Elizabeth Perkins

Like Henry Ford, Elizabeth Perkins of York, Maine, spent considerable time and energy in the early to mid-20th century restoring and interpreting historic buildings. Many of these buildings are now part of Museums of Old York. Today, the Museum's campus consists of eight historic buildings, including three historic houses, a schoolhouse, a jail, a tavern, a wharf and warehouse, and a general store. Perkins was heavily involved in the restoration of a number of these buildings, including the jail, schoolhouse, tavern, and one of the historic houses. Unlike Ford's Greenfield Village, the buildings are not arranged as a singular village unit; though a number of the buildings are concentrated in the center of York, some are located elsewhere throughout town.

From the early 1900s until her death in 1952, Elizabeth Perkins held an influential position in York's various museums and historical societies. Though not a Maine native, Perkins came to regard York as her home and worked tirelessly to preserve and interpret its history in museums and festivals. Born in 1869 to an Episcopal minister and his wife, Perkins grew up in New York City, where she "received little formal education and was likely tutored by her mother."[180] Perkins maintained a close relationship with her mother into adulthood, and the two traveled extensively throughout the nation and world together. Their trips often included excursions to historical sites and resulted in

[180] "Perkins House Top Ten Most Frequently Asked Questions," Museums of Old York Training Manual, 2011. MOYA.

the purchase of many antiques for display in the Perkins's summer home in York.[181]

In York, Perkins maintained extensive involvement in the town's two historical societies, the Old York Historical and Improvement Society and the Old Gaol Museum Committee, before starting her own historical organization, the Society for the Preservation of Historic Landmarks in York County. In working with all of these organizations, Perkins advocated for the preservation of historic buildings, participated directly in restoration efforts, and planned a number of historically based festivals. Perkins, who had neither a husband nor children, made a will with provisions for establishing a museum from her home and its many antiques, ensuring her continued influence in portrayals of York's local history.[182]

In her restoration efforts, Perkins strove to weave together nostalgic and factual information to create unique, memorable, and fun encounters with the past. Though her rhetoric is in many cases similar to Ford's, she often did not implement historic interpretation as effectively as Ford in Greenfield Village. In many cases Perkins treated completely fictionalized versions of the past as factual, and she portrayed them as true. In doing so, Perkins abused the ability to use creative license in interpreting history, creating grossly inaccurate images of the past.

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[181] "The Perkins Family," Museums of Old York Training Manual, 2011. MOYA.
[182] "Elizabeth Perkins House Tour," Museums of Old York Training Manual, 2011. MOYA.

Perkins and History

In general, Perkins's methodology in historic interpretation can be regarded as reflective of the colonial revival movement. A popular way of looking at history in the 1930s, the movement emphasized a sentimentalized view of history that celebrated the perceived simplicity and purity of earlier times. By looking at the past in this idealized way, colonial revivalists often presented a view of history that was "a caricature of what the past might have been," rather than an accurate picture of what it was.[183] In Maine especially, middle class residents and summer visitors began to "embrace the romantic image of New England's storied coastal villages" and promote it as worthy of tourists' interest.[184] This interest in the past, romanticized as it was, helped to spur a historic preservation movement as people became passionate about saving the tangible remains of a time they viewed as simple, pure, and ideally democratic.[185]

Examination of Perkins's early restoration projects and documents related to her historical pursuits offer more specific insight regarding her conceptions of the past. The restoration of her own summer home in York illustrates the ways in which Perkins thought about and interacted with history and its artifacts. Though this was a personal rather than public project, its methodologies reflect much of Perkins's later work interpreting history for the public.

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[183] Richard Guy Wilson, "What Is the Colonial Revival?" *Re-Creating the American Past,* eds. Richard Guy Wilson, Shaun Eyring, and Kenny Marotta (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 9.
[184] Kevin D. Murphy, *The Colonial Revival in Maine,* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 8.
[185] Wilson, "What is the Colonial Revival?" 6.

The Perkins family purchased a summer home on the banks of the York River in 1898. In the 1880s, the family began visiting York from their New York City home, and trips to Maine soon became an annual summertime affair, particularly for Elizabeth and her mother, Mary. The Perkins women were the primary inhabitants of the summer house in York, as Reverend Perkins generally stayed in New York to work on parish projects.[186]

As a historic 17th century structure, the summer home represents Perkins's budding interest in York's local history. The Perkins women affectionately called their home the "Piggin House," referencing a type of antique bucket with a long wooden handle rising vertically from one side. Because the Piggin House originally consisted of only one small room and a tall chimney, it bore a resemblance to such a bucket. The house was in need of many repairs when the Perkins women purchased it, but this did not dampen their enthusiasm for the property. In the rundown old house, they saw an opportunity to undertake restorations that would showcase its colonial-era beauty. The two thoroughly enjoyed working on this project, and even when "the necessary structural repairs were hardly underway . . . both women were haunting antique auctions and shops and, with shrewd bargaining, collecting furnishings that would establish the proper atmosphere in the Piggin House."[187]

The hunt for antiques took Mary and Elizabeth to shops locally and abroad. As avid world travelers and close companions, the pair took a number of trips together, purchasing eye-catching relics and antiques in various locations. A

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[186] Rose H. Howe, *Elizabeth Bishop Perkins of York* (Brunswick, Maine: Harpswell Press, 1979), 20-21; "Perkins House Tour," Museums of Old York Training Manual.
[187] Howe, *Elizabeth Bishop Perkins of York,* 20.

trek to Egypt yielded souvenirs of funerary shawabti figurines and a trip to Italy a mosaic made from salvaged pieces of Roman ruins.[188] Closer to home, Mary and Elizabeth, purchased antique trinkets and furniture from shops and dealers in places like Wells, Kittery, and Lewiston, Maine, and Dover and Tilton, New Hampshire. These antique purchases supplemented the Perkins's generous supply of antique family heirloom furniture.[189]

Much of Mary and Elizabeth's early collecting was undertaken to furnish their own home, and the two displayed antique dishes, furniture, and trinkets throughout the house. Some of the pieces were meant to be admired and others used. For instance, Perkins kept a set of antique candlesticks close to the stairs and would encourage visitors to find their upstairs rooms at night by candlelight, as the home's original inhabitants would have done.[190] The antiques scattered throughout the house, combined with the convenience of modern plumbing and electricity, offered the Perkins women the best of both worlds in enabling them to live modern lives in a historic setting. Perkins wanted to "reflect the past while not slavishly reproducing it—[she created] rooms holding a flavor of the past through the use of inherited and purchased antiques against a backdrop of old wood and plaster, yet at the same time [the rooms possessed] comfort and livability."[191]

Perkins restored and decorated her home to reflect past eras, loosely interpreting history to allow for contemporary conveniences and stylistic choices.

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[188] "Elizabeth Perkins House Tour," Museums of Old York Training Manual.
[189] Thomas B. Johnson, *The Feel of the Colonial: Interiors of the Perkins House,* Elizabeth Bishop Perkins Fellowship Report, August 1989, 6. MOYA: 747.2J.
[190] "Elizabeth Perkins House Tour," Museums of Old York Training Manual.
[191] Johnson, *The Feel of the Colonial,* 9.

Perkins's other historical pursuits illustrate a similar ideology regarding the presentation of history, as can be seen in a 1938 festival titled "Days of Our Forefathers." Perkins was heavily involved in planning the event, which made use of historic building tours, costumed interpreters, and re-enactments of historic events to tell stories from the town's past; the festival itself will be addressed in greater detail in later sections of this chapter.

Here, examination of festival-related correspondence with Katherine Marshall, another member of the event's planning committee, speaks to Perkins's views regarding historic interpretation. A note from Marshall reads: "I am returning by accompanying mail the C.S. Monitor article you so kindly sent me."[192] The article referenced is titled "Celebrating With Authenticity" and bears, scrawled under the title and likely in Perkins's handwriting, the words "aimed at York?" The article criticizes New England's historic festivals for relying too heavily on stories rather than facts, asserting that: "it is common knowledge that few people are content to repeat a story without trying to make it better by adding something." These additions, though, according to author Carl Greenleaf Beede, "have no place in such an enterprise," and "only facts that have been intelligently proved should ever have a part in an historical occasion." Bede criticizes historic festivals for "lacking studied, carefully checked and proven records," and relying too heavily on stories, legends, and traditions that "too often…do not survive the test of cool and thorough examination."[193]

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[192] Letter from Katherine E. Marshall to Elizabeth Perkins, 30 June 1938. MOYA: EB Perkins Collection, P900-25-4.
[193] Carl Greenleaf Beede, "Celebrating With Authenticity," *Christina Science Monitor,* June 1938. MOYA: EB Perkins Collection, P900-25-4.

Marshall strongly disagreed with Bede's assessment of New England's historic festivals. According to her, the article's author "follows the modern trend of debunkism. He evidently prefers the dry, bleached bones of fact, to the thrill and romance of tradition." Marshall further asserts that: "living in the machine age, I think it does us all good to make an occasional excursion into the past. Even if our folktales are only traditional and colored by time, there is much we can learn from the brave pioneers who left us this beautiful town."[194]

Like Marshall, preservation architect Howard Peck also saw more in history than cold, hard facts. Throughout the 1940s, Peck worked closely with Perkins to restore an 18th century tavern; in reflecting on this project in his final report, Peck asserts that "the word 'Restoration' so universally used, can be, and I think should be thought of more in terms of people and the 'Atmosphere' of the Times in which they lived, rather than interpreted in the 'Literal Sense' of – Physical Replacement."[195] Peck goes on to clarify that he tried very hard to make the physical restoration of the tavern as accurate as possible, but he posits the "ultimate aim" of the project as "almost a 'Resurrection' in the Spiritual sense of those Pre-Revolutionary Times when; Men and women laughed and suffered, and whose hearts and souls were tried even far more than our own are now."[196] In buildings and objects, Peck saw the spirit of the people who built and used them. Rather than simply artifacts, Peck saw these things as tangible representations of very personal stories. Viewing the tavern building in this way, Peck seemed

[194] Letter from Marshall to Perkins, 30 June 1938.
[195] Howard Peck, "A Report on the Restoration of Jefferds Tavern," 9 September 1942. MOYA: Jefferds Tavern File.
[196] Peck, "Report on Restoration," 2.

thoroughly enchanted by the old structure and, in the conclusion to his report, muses that "there is a gratified look about [the tavern]; -The Cracks, - are Smiles, and the Knots are nods of understanding" regarding the loving restoration project completed by Peck and Perkins.[197]

Though penned by her collaborators, these documents reflect Perkins's own historic sensibilities, as well. In the opinions of individuals like Perkins, Marshall, and Peck, the story of history should be told with flair and pizzazz, and this exciting story can function as an escape to simpler times and an inspiration in the present day. In this view, historians need not choose between historical accuracy and imaginative storytelling; instead, the two can be blended to create environments and experiences that could both educate the public and provoke reflection on the achievements of the past and the direction of the future.

In theory, Perkins's views regarding historical interpretation seem to endorse the creation of generally historic atmospheres as discussed in Chapter 1. However, in her work restoring historic buildings and planning historic events, Perkins juxtaposed minutely accurate and grossly fictionalized representations of history and, in so doing, often fell short of creating effective historic atmospheres. Rather than blending accurate facts with embellished impressions, Perkins used entirely fictional content in her interpretations of history, and she often failed to alert visitors that the content presented was inaccurate. Thus, Perkins's portrayals of history often did not present generalized historic atmospheres but fundamentally altered and idealized representations of the past. In many cases, Perkins abused the ability to creatively interpret content in an immersive history

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[197] Peck, "Report on Restoration," 8

setting, creating misleading rather than enhanced pictures of the past. This tendency can be seen by examining Perkins's historic activities as related to the restoration of schoolhouse and tavern buildings, and the planning of historically based festivals.

Schoolhouse Restoration

Perkins's first experiences in public historic preservation stemmed from her involvement in the Old York Historical and Improvement Society. As a charter member when the organization was formed in 1900, Perkins focused her energies on researching local history. The Society, though, focused much of its effort on town beautification projects ranging from planting trees to campaigning for the placement of public garbage cans.[198] As part of its secondary historical mission, the Society collaborated with the town's Old Gaol Museum Committee, an organization that ran a museum in the 1653 gaol set in the center of York. In addition to the Gaol's period rooms and dungeon cells, it included a room of "colonial relics" to celebrate the 18th century past that Perkins and her contemporaries held most dear.[199]

In 1936, the Old York Historical and Improvement Society embarked on an ambitious project to restore an 18th century schoolhouse in York. Perkins took charge over this initiative, corresponding directly with the project's architect, Philip Dana Orcutt of Boston, and planning the interior exhibition at the schoolhouse. In planning for the project, Orcutt expressed great interest in

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[198] Melissa Mosher, *Invented Heritage: Elizabeth Perkins and the Colonial Revival in York, Maine,* BA Thesis, Bates College, 7 December 1984, 32. MOYA: 974.195YOR c.2.
[199] Mosher, *Invented Heritage,* 32.

employing historically accurate methods of construction. In a 1937 letter to Perkins, Orcutt mentioned that he "had some H.A.B.S. plans of schoolhouses shipped to me care of you."[200] The HABS (Historical American Buildings Survey) project referenced by Orcutt was sponsored by the National Park Service and sought to document historic buildings through photographs, architectural renderings, and written documents.[201] The HABS plans Orcutt acquired undoubtedly included detailed information about 18th century construction methods, and by examining such documents, Orcutt likely gained a thorough understanding of historic structures similar to York's. Additionally, Orcutt suggested that he and Perkins explore other historic buildings in the York area, including an old schoolhouse in Alna, Maine, and the historic 1716 Warner House in Portsmouth, New Hampshire; in examining these buildings, Orcutt hoped to gain a better sense of the region's historic construction methods.[202]

Though Orcutt seemed intent on restoring the schoolhouse with traditional historic accuracy, the exhibition that Perkins planned inside the building incorporated some imaginative renderings of history. Perkins created a diorama setting in the schoolhouse, using mannequins in colonial costumes to portray the schoolmaster and his students. She included a mannequin of a Native American student in the building, though no records exist of Native American students attending school in York. The inclusion of the Native American student in

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[200] Letter from Philip Dana Orcutt to Elizabeth Perkins, 18 August 1937. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P200-3-11.
[201] The Library of Congress, "Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscapes Survey," http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/.
[202] Letters from Philip Dana Orcutt to Elizabeth Perkins, 18 August and 8 September 1937. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P200-3-11.

Perkins's rendering of the schoolhouse is "representative of [Perkins's] understanding of early American democracy" rather than a reflection of the York's true history.[203]

In general, the use of mannequins in a diorama setting can be considered a method of creating an immersive history environment. As discussed in Chapter 1, this type of display tries to re-create a historical setting and engross visitors in a historic time period. In creating a historic setting within the schoolhouse, Perkins was at liberty to creatively interpret the history she presented in order to make it more comprehensible or interesting for visitors. However, by placing a Native American student in her diorama, Perkins changed essential content to create a falsified, rather than enhanced, version of history. To Perkins, who seemed fascinated with the early colonists' interactions with Native Americans, the schoolhouse scene must have seemed more exciting with the inclusion of a Native American pupil.[204] Including the Native American student, though, gave visitors distinct impressions about the kinds of relationships that existed between colonists and Native Americans in the mid- to late-18th century, portraying particularly amicable relations. During this era, though, relations between the groups were strained and complicated; both British and French colonists tried to use Native American tribes (in Maine, particularly the Abenaki) to fight against their colonial rivals. The colonists sometimes failed to follow through on promises made to their Native American allies, often resulting in violence. After the American

[203] Mosher *Invented Heritage*, 34.
[204] Perkins's interest in York's early Native American encounters comes through in fictionalized stories about the history of Jefferds Tavern and in her purchase of a "cigar store Indian" to be placed in her yard as a tribute to the area's original Abenaki inhabitants.

Revolution, most Abenaki land was seized, and tribal members moved to Canada.[205] By implying peaceful relationships between the two groups, therefore, Perkins's schoolhouse diorama takes its creative license too far, giving an incorrect impression of history rather than one that creates a historic environment from which accurate and comprehensible impressions can be acquired.

"Days of Our Forefathers" Festival

In addition to the schoolhouse restoration project, Perkins was also heavily involved in planning a historical event titled "Days of Our Forefathers." Under the auspices of the Old York Historical and Improvement Society, planning for the festival began in October 1937. At this time, Perkins put forth the idea of a "two day revival of Old York" in which the Society would "open such old houses as are in private families and the Gaol and the School House to the public, and in the evening . . . give in the Town Hall an Old Fashioned Concert with 18th Century music, singing, and instrumental."[206] Subsequent planning for the event saw it grow to include tour guides in period costumes and a reenactment of an 18th century church service.[207] Though the event cannot be directly equated with a museum experience, it bears a number of similarities to immersive history museums, including the creation of historic settings, representations of historic people, and a dual purpose of education and entertainment. As such, the event

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[205] Spencer C. Tucker, ed., *Encyclopedia of North American Indian Wars, 1607-1890,* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2011), xli-xliii, 1-2.
[206] "Days of Our Forefathers" planning committee meeting minutes, 2 October 1937. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P600-6-11.
[207] "Olde Yorke-Maine Invites you to Re-Live the Days of Our Forefathers" flyer, 1938. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P600-6-11.

can be considered an immersive history experience and evaluated on the same principles as those associated with immersive history museums.

Many of the attractions at the "Days of Our Forefathers" event were based loosely on legends that had no basis in fact, illustrating Perkins's tendency to abuse the privilege of creative license in interpreting history. For instance, fliers advertising the event encouraged visitors to tour the Piggin House, where "an underground passage leads to the river," and to see the old cemetery and "witch's grave" where "a large slab of stone is placed to keep her from rising and again dealing with 'speritts.'"[208] Though these exciting stories likely attracted visitors, they were entirely fictional. Throughout her life, Perkins asserted the existence of a smuggling tunnel running from her home to the York River; this story likely stemmed from local legends about pirates sailing the York River when hiding their bounty. Recent excavations of the Perkins House grounds, however, reveal no evidence of a tunnel that would have been used for such purposes. Similarly, the purported "witch's grave" in the cemetery bears no connection to supernatural activity. The headstone bears a particularly mournful inscription from a loving husband, and the stone slab placed over the grave was meant to keep animals from rooting at it, rather than to keep the spirit of the deceased in the ground.[209] Stories of smuggling and sorcery, though, are far more exciting than the truth of history, making such stories appealing for purposes of attracting visitors to the event and keeping them entertained while there.

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[208] "Olde Yorke-Maine Invites you to Re-Live the Days of Our Forefathers" flyer, 1938. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P600-6-11.
[209] Mosher *Invented Heritage*, 56, 58.

As discussed in Chapter 1, using creative license in interpretations of history can be not only acceptable, but also beneficial in immersive history environments. Perkins's portrayal of legends as facts, though, illustrates abuse of this privilege. Rather than serving to clarify content, create a generally historic setting, or help visitors to fulfill identity-related needs, Perkins's use of inaccurate stories gives entirely false impressions of the past. By portraying these stories, Perkins was not addressing history at all; the stories are so far from factual that they cannot even be considered alterations of history, but rather, alternate versions of history. Portrayal of such alternate histories cannot fulfill the educational goals of a museum or its visitors, and thus such portrayals are not useful in immersive history settings.

Though the legends presented in "Days of Our Forefathers" were decidedly inaccurate, the event did include elements that helped to create a historic atmosphere, as is most evident in the festival's costuming. From the beginning of the planning process, Perkins and other event organizers found it essential to put as many participants as possible in appropriate period clothing. The costumes would offer an air of quaint authenticity to the event, according to Perkins.[210]

In Perkins's eyes, use of accurate costumes was paramount to the success of the event. Minutes from planning meetings repeatedly mention historical costuming books, such as *Historic Dress in America* by Elisabeth McClelland and *Two Centuries of Costume* by Alice Morse Earle, and event planning scrapbooks

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[210] "Days of Our Forefathers" planning committee meeting notes 21 March 1938. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P600-6-11. "Old York Days Have National Significance," *York Transcript,* 29 July 1938. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P900-25-4.

include sketches of costumes that would be appropriate for various event activities.[211] Perkins even went so far as to send a flyer to all York residents requesting that they "wear the simple clothes that were worn in the 17th and 18th centuries" during the festival, in order to achieve an immersive history experience for event attendees. Referencing similar events at places like Williamsburg and Plimoth, the flyer maintains that, in these instances "every one cooperates to make the best possible effect when they celebrate a revival of the old days of their community, and the result is not only one of picturesque beauty but it brings much money into the towns and rouses interest in the preservation of buildings that have stood since the days of the early settlers."[212] In a 1938 newspaper article, residents were also encouraged to wear period costumes for the festival and were reminded that: "the more people who are in costume—the correct costume of the period—the more realistic will be the celebration."[213] Another article the same year explained to readers that: "because we expect historians and antiquarians to visit us in August great care must be taken to have all details as correct as possible."[214]

Various newspaper articles about "Days of Our Forefathers" highlight its historic atmosphere and its function as a time machine of sorts, whisking visitors back in time to both the simplicity and excitement of the colonial days. For instance, one 1938 article announced that, at the town's church, "an hour glass

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[211] "Days of Our Forefathers" planning committee meeting 14 October 1937 and undated. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P600-6-11.
[212] Untitled Flyer distributed to York residents, 1938. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P600-6-11.
[213] "Old York Days Have National Significance," *York Transcript,* 20 July 1938. MOYA: EB Perkins Collection, P900-25-4.
[214] "Quaint Costumes for Old York Day" *York Transcript,* undated. MOYA: EB Perkins Collection, P900-25-4.

will mark the time—in brief, it will be a faithful re-enactment of the worship service in Colonial days."[215] Another article pointed out that "everything is being done to create an atmosphere of Colonial hospitality . . . maids and matrons, looking for all the world like the stately women of Revolutionary times, [will be] standing ready to receive the guests."[216] An article from the *Portland Press Herald* reported that "the town of York is prepared to turn back the pages of history and to relive the "Days of Our Forefathers."[217]

With good weather and high attendance, "Days of Our Forefathers" was an immense success. Newspaper reviews raved about the festival, calling it "without question the finest thing that has ever been undertaken in putting forward the historic nature of York."[218] Another held Perkins in high regard for her work on the project, pointing out that she "spared neither strength, time nor money to make it the success it was" and thus deserved "unqualified praise."[219]

In planning "Days of Our Forefathers," Perkins was careful to maintain strict historical accuracy in certain specific areas, such as costuming, but she was alarmingly loose in regards to the accuracy of the overall history of York told at the event. The combination of minute accuracy in some areas and gross inaccuracy in others is largely ineffective in creating the kind of historic

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[215] "Maine Village to Celebrate," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 17 July 1938. MOYA: EB Perkins Collection, P900-25-4.
[216] Jane Wister, "York harbor Celebration Attracts Maine Visitors," *Philadelphia Ledger,* 15 July 1938. MOYA: EB Perkins Collection, P900-25-4.
Many newspapers also emphasize that many of those in costume for the festival are direct descendents of the early settlers of York.
[217] "Town of York to Turn Back Pages of History," *Portland Press Herald,* 18 August 1939. MOYA: EB Perkins Collection, P900-25-4.
[218] "Conuduct 'Father Moody Sunday' at York" *The Union,* Manchester, NH , 22 August 1938. MOYA: EB Perkins Collection, P900-25-4.
[219] "Open House Day Like Colonial Pageant," *York Transcript,* undated. MOYA: EB Perkins Collection, P900-25-4.

atmospheres that are beneficial for museums and their visitors. As discussed by Handler and Gable in regards to Colonial Williamsburg, by focusing on accuracy in very specific areas of interpretation, museums sometimes undermine their own ability to interpret historical content in meaningful and effective ways. When minute accuracy becomes of paramount importance, larger thematic content can often become obscured.[220] Though adamant about strict accuracy in one specific area, Perkins allowed the overall impression given by the "Days of Our Forefathers" event to be inaccurate. By basing the historical content presented on legends, Perkins failed to create an effective historic atmosphere and instead created an environment in which the minute accuracy of some elements obscured the interpretive liberties taken in others.

Formation of "Historic Landmarks" Society

Even with historic projects like the restoration of the schoolhouse and the "Days of Our Forefathers" event, the historical activities of the Old York Historical and Improvement Society were not enough for Perkins; the Society's focus still rested primarily on initiatives for public sanitation and town beautification. In 1939, Perkins tried to gain the Society's support for the restoration of Jefferds Tavern, an 18th century building located a few miles north of York in the town of Wells. The Society politely declined involvement in the project, arguing that the Tavern's location in Wells rather than York placed it outside the scope of the Society's concern. Perkins, though, was determined to

[220] Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The new History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 92-93.

save the Tavern, and, outside of the Society, collaborated with other interested individuals to purchase the Tavern and begin restorations. Work progressed under Perkins's direction until 1941, when she founded a new historical society. Perkins titled this organization the Society for the Preservation of Historic Landmarks in York County (referred to as "Historic Landmarks") and was finally able to devote her full time and energy to preservation projects.[221]

As stated in the organization's incorporation papers, the purpose of Historic Landmarks was "to preserve for future generations the various historic landmarks in York County, Maine . . . to gather, preserve and disseminate information regarding such landmarks, and to preserve and perpetuate the memory of those men and women who built them or are otherwise associated with their history."[222] Once organized, Historic Landmarks took on the restoration of Jefferds Tavern.

Jefferds Tavern Restoration

Before its restoration in the mid-20th century, Jefferds Tavern enjoyed a long and varied history. Built by Samuel Jefferds in 1754, the Tavern operated in conjunction with the family's fulling and grist mill in Wells, Maine, near the Merriland River. The building was only used as a tavern for about 35 years, until Jefferds's death in 1790. In the 1820s, a Boston entrepreneur bought the building and rented it to various tenants for several decades. After use in conjunction with a sawmill constructed on the property in the latter half of the 19th century, the

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[221] Howe, *Elizabeth Bishop Perkins of York,* 66-71.
[222] Incorporation Papers for the Society for the Preservation of Historic Landmarks in York County, 1941. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P600-6-2.

building was used simply as a shed from about 1880 to 1900. The Tavern fell into disrepair by the 1920s, when William Barry, a local architect and historic preservationist, took it upon himself to restore the building and open it as a small museum. Upon his death, Barry willed the Tavern to his nephew, George Lord, who owned the building when Elizabeth Perkins acquired it in 1939.[223]

In the 1920s, Barry undertook his own Tavern restoration. His efforts included a number of romanticized elements, and he did not seem largely concerned with strict historical accuracy. Barry surrounded the Tavern's hearth with excessive cooking supplies and was intent on placing a cooking crane there, likely in reference to Longfellow's poem "The Hanging of the Crane." Barry likely understood the symbolic importance of the hearth as the heart of a household, and his special treatment of this area in the Tavern illustrates a sense of history that emphasized such emotional and nostalgic ideals. Other areas in the Tavern showcased spinning wheels, pewter dishes, and other stereotypically colonial pieces. These elements, too, present a simplified view of history as popularized in novels and poetry. From the mid-1920s until his death in 1932, Barry allowed friends, family, and interested passers by to tour the Tavern as a small museum.[224]

According to Maine historian Kevin Murphy, Jefferds Tavern "symbolized a romanticized past" to Barry, and he restored the building within

[223] Colleen Campbell, Teplyn Fournier, Kelsey Mullen, "A Tavern's Tale: Repurposing Jefferds Tavern" Elizabeth Bishop Perkins Fellows report, 2010. MOYA.
[224] Kevin D. Murphy, *A Stroll Thro' the Past: The Career of William Edward Barry, 1846-1932,* unpublished seminar paper, 1984, 24. MOYA: 920.02.

the framework of this idealized sense of history.[225] Barry's goal in his Tavern restoration, therefore, seems to have been the creation of a generally colonial atmosphere, and, as such, he simplified content by over-emphasizing stereotypically colonial elements and themes. Barry's restoration and the changes it introduced to the Tavern set the stage for Perkins's own interpretation of the building in the 1940s.

In 1939, Perkins acquired the Tavern from Barry's nephew, George Lord. A series of letters between Perkins and Lord outline the building's ownership transfer, and in these letters, Perkins makes a strong practical and emotional appeal for the Tavern's preservation and its move to York. In a letter dated September 26, 1939, Perkins points out the rampant vandalism of the historic site, telling Lord that "I cannot see another person's property ruthlessly destroyed without reporting it." Perkins goes on to specify that: "boys of the neighborhood have thrown stones through every window…I have rescued the only three whole panes that are left and have set them aside for you in case you wish to commence to repair the damage." Perkins offered to buy the Tavern for $400 and see to its preservation, promising that: "little by little we would repair the damage and put up a tablet with the name of your wife's family thus preserving its history to the last owner."[226] Lord responded promptly, agreeing to the proposed price but with the stipulation that the Tavern "remain on its present location."[227]

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[225] Murphy, *Stroll Thro' the Past,* 23.
[226] Letter from Elizabeth Perkins to George Lord, 26 September 1939. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P200-3-11.
[227] Letter from George Lord to Elizabeth Perkins, 1 October 1939. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P200-3-11.

In trying to convince Lord to sell the Tavern and allow its removal to York, Perkins emphasized the building's value as an important historical object. Perkins asserted the necessity of moving the building to a "central place [where] it would be a conspicuous monument relating to the history of Maine and a memorial to the Jefford [sic] family."[228] Perkins's description of the Tavern as a monument and a memorial indicates her perception of the building as something to be celebrated and even venerated for its long and interesting history. In this view, the Tavern becomes an embodiment of the region's rich history, and its preservation represents a reverent remembrance of earlier days.

Perkins also set out practical reasons for the Tavern's removal to York, citing the costly need of a year-round caretaker if the building remained in Wells. Perkins assured Lord that he would "be doing a splendid thing by letting this association acquire [the Tavern] and [save] it for future generations."[229] The letter was effective and not only did Lord assent to having the Tavern moved, but he also outright gave the building to Perkins, dismissing the previously discussed $400 purchase price.[230]

In overseeing the restoration of Jefferds Tavern, Perkins showed extensive concern for historical fact and maintained great interest in making the building accurate in a traditional, scholarly way. In a letter to Lord less than two weeks after the transfer of ownership was originally discussed, Perkins inquired about so

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[228] Letter from Elizabeth Perkins to George Lord, 28 October 1939. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P200-3-11.
[229] Letter from Elizabeth Perkins to George Lord, 28 October 1939. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P200-3-11.
[230] Letter from George Lord to Elizabeth Perkins, 30 October 1939. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P200-3-11.

many details of the Tavern's history that she writes at one point "I'm sorry to bother you with all these questions but I am so interested I can't help ask questions."[231]

As restoration efforts progressed, Perkins maintained contact with William Sumner Appleton, founder of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA), asking for advice on the accurate restoration of the building. Perkins's letters address topics such as paint colors, wood finishes, and exterior decorative styles. Perkins's extensive inquiries sprung from her professed desire to "do what is appropriate for a very simple building on the outpost of civilization in the middle 18th century."[232]

Appleton's responses to Perkins's many questions were thorough, giving her historical context and making suggestions for historical accuracy in the Tavern. Appleton provided Perkins with appropriate options for paint colors and even sent her a sketch of a decorative doorframe in order to illustrate a particular style. Appleton also gave Perkins practical restoration advice, encouraging her to "make haste slowly…What you do not do this year in the way of painting can always be done next year; but what is once done can be undone only with much difficulty and at great expense."[233] In this way, Appleton encouraged Perkins to undertake her restoration work deliberately and seriously, striving to ensure the most historically accurate results possible.

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[231] Letter from Elizabeth Perkins to George Lord, 10 November 1939. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P200-3-11.
[232] Letter from Elizabeth Perkins to William Sumner Appleton, 31 August 1943. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P200-3-16.
[233] Letter from William Sumner Appleton to Elizabeth Perkins, 8 September 1943. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P200-3-16.

In addition to Appleton, Perkins maintained contact with other experts in the historical field; these individuals advised Perkins on issues of restoration, antique collecting, and other historical pursuits. Among Perkins's contacts were Washington D.C.'s Ambassador and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss, who had restored a historic mansion in the nation's capital, and Albert Wells, the founder of Old Sturbridge Village, an open-air museum in Massachusetts. Perkins also held a number of subscriptions to historical publications that would offer insight in restoration matters, including *Old Time New England* (SPNEA's periodical), *Antiques, The Antiquarian,* and *Connoisseur.*[234]

To carry out physical restoration work in the Tavern, Perkins hired Howard Peck, a local architect, to dismantle the building and reassemble it in its new location. Less than two weeks after Lord agreed to give Perkins the building, Peck set to work taking it apart. Working outdoors in a frosty Maine November, Peck noted on the 13th of the month that: "every piece is marked, identified, and recorded, and the work is most interesting although very cold."[235] Peck paid very careful attention to every detail of the Tavern's dismantling, ensuring that it could be reassembled as close to its original form as possible. Peck was adamant about documentation in every phase of work on the Tavern. In one instance, he heartily lamented the fact that he failed to document some of the wallpaper inside the Tavern, as one of the workmen completed its removal while Peck was not on site.

[234] Johnson, *The Feel of the Colonial*, 7-8.
[235] Letter from Howard Peck to Elizabeth Perkins, 13 November 1939. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P200-3-11.

Peck wrote to Perkins that he "managed to save a few scraps but it was a great disappointment and I'm awfully sorry."[236]

Peck was also careful to preserve the original character of the home, intent on reproducing the Tavern exactly as it stood, inclusive of any original imperfections it bore. In this vein, Peck identified the Tavern's chimney as "eccentric, to say the least," because it "wander[ed] from the cellar to the roof." Rather than try to correct this imperfection in the reconstruction, though, Peck instead made sure the chimney was thoroughly "noted, measured, and drawn" so it could be rebuilt exactly. Peck's thorough documentation of the Tavern reflects his belief that "nothing can be taken for granted or assumed," lest the reconstruction would not exactly match the original.[237]

Peck's "Restoration of Jefferd's Tavern—Recorded Notes" illustrates the architect's attention to detail and ability to "read" the building to gain insight about its history. The report outlines elements of the building that were likely original, and those that had been altered more recently. Based on careful examination of the structure, Peck concluded, for instance, that the Tavern's fireplaces were all original, that the Tavern once included a lean-to structure, that the interior pocket shutters were a recent addition, and that the front door had originally been located at the southern end of the building, rather than in the middle where it stood in 1939.[238] Many of these elements were likely changes

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[236] Letter from Howard Peck to Elizabeth Perkins, 13 December 1939. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P200-3-11.
[237] Letter from Howard Peck to Elizabeth Perkins, 24 November 1939. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P200-3-11.
[238] Howard Peck, "Restoration of Jefferd's Tavern—Recorded Notes" 22 May 1940. MOYA: Jefferds Tavern File.

that Barry made in his 1920s restoration of the Tavern. Some, like pocket shutters, are particularly colonial revivalist elements, making it very likely that Barry introduced them to the Tavern.

In order to uncover details of the Tavern's construction, Peck had to carefully analyze the structural components of the building, teasing meaning from its walls and floors. For instance, in order to determine the original location of the front door, Peck observed that "certain wood pieces securing the Door Frame are sawed, and comparatively new; and also…the 2nd floor Plate, or girt, extending over this door was CUT OUT at this point."[239] In this way, Peck used the building itself as a historical source, carefully examining every part of it and using the clues found to understand the structure's history and enable him to reassemble it in a historically accurate manner.

Even though Perkins and Peck paid attention to historical accuracy in many aspects of the Tavern's restoration, Perkins also creatively interpreted the Tavern's history to an alarming degree. Perkins was known for writing colorful stories, particularly about local history, and the Tavern provided an interesting subject for some of these stories. According to Perkins herself, her stories were "founded on fact but woven with imagination," but she often published these stories with no reference to the fact that they were based on legends or that portions were simply made up.[240] As addressed in Chapter 1, museums must maintain transparency with their visitors when presenting altered versions of history. Though such alterations can be made for beneficial interpretive reasons,

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[239] Howard Peck, "Restoration of Jefferd's Tavern—Recorded Notes" 22 May 1940. MOYA: Jefferds Tavern File.
[240] "Elizabeth Perkins House Tour," Museums of Old York Training Manual.

failure to identify them negates their value to visitors. Perkins's stories were presented in conjunction with restoration-related correspondence and events concerning the Tavern, necessitating her full transparency in their inaccuracies. By failing to acknowledge the fictionalized aspects of her stories, Perkins abused the ability to creatively interpret history in museum settings.

Perkins's story about Jefferds Tavern, titled "The Tavern that Went to War" presents a number of historical inaccuracies as truths. In a version of the story broadcast on the radio in 1944, Perkins included an anecdote about John Adams; in the story, Adams was at Jefferds Tavern en route to Falmouth, Maine, when he heard that the Boston Massacre had occurred. The story, though, contradicts Adams's own autobiography, in which he remembers being in South Boston when hearing of the massacre for the first time.[241] The same story also describes Samuel Jefferds himself as a staunch Patriot, Indian fighter, and an "important man to whom all news was brought either by Indian runners or often by dogs with a message fastened to their collars."[242] The story seems to contradict even itself here, as Jefferds is described as both relying on and fighting against Native Americans in Maine. Additionally, records indicate that Samuel Jefferds was not renowned as an "Indian fighter," though one of his ancestors did hold that reputation.[243]

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[241] Melissa Mosher, *Elizabeth Perkins and Jefferds Tavern: An Example of the Influence of the Colonial Revival Upon Museums,* MA Thesis, College of William and Mary, 1988, 35. MOYA: 974.195YOR.

[242] Elizabeth Perkins, "The Tavern that Went to War," transcript for radio broadcast, 1944, 2. MOYA: EB Perkins papers, P700-14-218.

[243] Mosher, *Elizabeth Perkins and Jefferds Tavern*, 34.

In a draft of a 1940s article about historic buildings in York, Perkins again makes imaginative claims about the Tavern. In her description, Perkins states that "an occasional Indian would come to the bar, tear off a strip of salt fish and drink his mug of black jack, itinerant peddlers would stop by to sell their wares, and a captive bear in a cage would be rolled to the front door and teased by the onlookers for a penny a look."[244] Though research has not indicated any direct contradiction to this story, its fanciful nature, stereotypical assertions, and Perkins's record of embellishing stories indicates that this, too, is likely not grounded in historical fact.

Perkins's fictionalized stories about the Tavern can be viewed, in part, as propagandistic attempts to rally support for the World War II war effort. Originally, Perkins intended to use the Tavern as a canteen for local soldiers, but when this proved not to be feasible, she instead decided to use the building as an "Aid to All Allies" center. Here, local residents gathered to compile care packages for troops overseas, hold clothing drives for European refugees, and participate in fundraisers for the war effort. The focus of Perkins's efforts concerning the Tavern during these years seems to be on this function, rather than on the building's faithful restoration. In a 1942 newspaper article that recounts a fictionalized history of the Tavern, Perkins maintains that "to fulfill is destiny, the Tavern must be used for war work for the duration."[245] A membership appeal letter from Historic Landmarks outlines the war work going on at the Tavern and

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[244] Elizabeth Perkins, untitled article draft, 1939-1950," 1. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P600-6-4.
[245] Elizabeth Perkins, "Jefferds Tavern with Legends of Stage Coach Days Being Salvaged from Decay," *Biddeford Daily Journal*, 1942. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P700-8-10.

simply states that: "after the war the tavern will be made into a museum and tea room open to the public."[246]

In references like these, it is obvious that the Tavern's primary purpose during the 1940s was for war work, and its historical nature became secondary to that goal. The building's history was used to enhance the appeal of performing war work there, and Perkins often tried to make connections between past and present to inspire patriotism for the war effort. Another 1940s appeal letter from Historic Landmarks states that the "Tavern will be adapted to circumstances… In war times the building may be used for war service, as it was doubtless used during the Revolution when the Continental army camped at its very doors."[247] In this way, Perkins colored the building's past to fit the needs of the present day, using history as a tool to inspire action in the present. Though the use of history as propaganda is outside the scope of this study, this usage explains some of Perkins's historical inaccuracy in this case.

After the end of World War II, Perkins did indeed open the Tavern as a museum. The Tavern's interior exhibits included a number of colonial revivalist and fictionalized elements, such as Indian shutters and parson's cupboards. Indian shutters opened and closed from the inside of windows, oftentimes sliding directly into pockets in the surrounding wall's construction; this type of shutter received its name from its supposed function in 18th century buildings. Colonial revivalists posited these shutters as safeguards against Indian attacks, holding that

[246] Undated membership appeal letter from Historic Landmarks. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P600-6-5.
[247] Undated membership appeal letter from Historic Landmarks. MOYA: EB Perkins Papers, P600-6-5.

the shutters could be closed during a raid to protect the people inside. Parson's cupboards, concealed compartments located above fireplaces, were said to be used to store a parson's unmentionable items, such as alcohol, from nosy visiting parishioners. In reality, both of these elements have rather mundane explanations; Indian shutters merely helped to regulate the amount of sunlight in a room and thus control interior temperatures, and Parson's cupboards served as storage areas for items that needed to be warmed and dried.[248] Perkins's use of these features in Jefferds Tavern illustrates both her involvement in the colonial revival movement and her attempt to make history intriguing and exciting by offering alternate explanations for historical elements.

In the Jefferds Tavern project, Perkins was careful to ensure the traditional accuracy of certain elements, while in other cases she presented blatant inaccuracies as fact. These two disparate approaches to interpreting historic content did not mix well with one another. Rather than combining accurate elements with embellished portrayals of history to create a generally historic atmosphere, Perkins instead used an accurately re-created setting as a backdrop for the portrayal of inaccurate stories. Perhaps the accurately re-created building seemed to lend legitimacy to fictionalized stories and anachronistic architectural elements. As discussed previously, the minute accuracy of some elements of a restoration can serve to obscure the inaccuracy of others. In Jefferds Tavern, such inconsistency created an atmosphere that was more likely to confuse visitors with its layers of accuracy and inaccuracy than to offer meaningful insight about a historical time period.

[248] Mosher, *Elizabeth Perkins and Jefferds Tavern*, 35-36.

Perkins's Legacy in York

In the restoration of historic buildings and implementation of historic events, Perkins professed a desire to create historic atmospheres that would offer accurate impressions of the past in conjunction with romanticized and nostalgically influenced elements. As discussed in Chapter 1, this method can be effectively used to create generally historic atmospheres in which visitors can both learn historic content and fulfill their own identity-related goals. However, by taking too many liberties in her interpretations of history, Perkins failed to effectively use this method of historic presentation. Instead, she presented blatant falsehoods as historical fact, obscuring the truth of history in favor of contrived representations of the past. In this vein, David Lowenthal maintains that: "whatever rhetorical device the historian deploys, the tenets of his craft forbid him knowingly to invent or to exclude things that affect his conclusions."[249] Perkins's alterations to historical content were often drastic and did indeed affect conclusions drawn from them, making such alterations extreme and inappropriate in the creation of generally historic atmospheres in museum settings.

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[249] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 229.

Conclusion

Henry Ford and Elizabeth Perkins created museums in an era when interpretive museum theory was in its nascent stages, making them pioneers in the field. In creating their museums, the two learned what to do as they did it, finding successes and failures along the way. Without definitive museum standards, Perkins and Ford experimented in the ways their museums and events would address historical topics. As discussed throughout this study, some of their actions effectively created generally historic atmospheres, while others did not. By looking at their actions in light of current museum scholarship, today's museum professionals can better understand the fundamental purposes and uniqueness of immersive history sites.

Overall, Ford and Perkins highlight effective and extreme uses of creative license in historical interpretation. Though museums should try to create generally historic atmospheres in order to both teach visitors about the past and help them to achieve their own identity-related goals, these historic atmospheres cannot be blatantly fictionalized. The line between appropriate and inappropriate interpretation is difficult to draw, but looking at Ford's and Perkins's museums can help to define a general standard. While immersive history museums cannot portray purely fictional stories as fact, they can incorporate fictional elements to create atmospheres that generally reflect a past era. This treatment of history does not cheapen a museum's content; it simply addresses this content from the angle that is most beneficial and appropriate in the very specific setting of an immersive history museum.

Those who would completely write off immersive history sites as shoddy, overly idealized, inaccurate representations of the past miss the fundamental point of the institutions and the beauty in the kind of work they do. Immersive history sites are the historical fiction of the museum sphere, using embellishment, imagination, and a measure of creative license to bring history to life for visitors and portray a memorable atmosphere of a past era. The institutions can never be entirely and perfectly "accurate," yet this limitation is also part of the unique charm and effectiveness of the institutions.

At the conclusion of his study of museum visitors, John Falk wonders, "what would a society be like if there was no place to satiate curiosity, or help children learn, or escape the pressures of a crazy urban world?"[250] Immersive history museums serve all of these essential functions, and a world without them would be severely lacking in views of history that are thought-provoking, memorable, and meaningful both for what they convey about the past and inspire in the present.

[250] John H. Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009), 246.

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VF	Archives Vertical File at the Benson Ford Research Center
MOYA	Museums of Old York Archives

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