

If These Walls Could Talk:
Museum Interpretation In Theory and Practice

A Senior Thesis submitted in partial requirement for a

B.A. in History

by Rebecca B. Preiss on 15 April 2002

under the advisement of Professor Emma Lapsansky

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Section 1	
Objects as History and the Rise of Interpretation	8
Section 2	
Shifting the Focus: Museums and Ordinary People	21
Section 3	
Adding New Histories: Women and African-Americans	33
Section 4	
Educational Programming	45
Conclusion	56
Bibliographic Essay	62
Bibliography	64

Acknowledgements

For Emma, whose guidance and knowledge made this document possible.

For my Freshmen Writing Professor, who thought I didn't belong at Haverford.

For Dad, who gave me everything he never had.

For Mom and Sarah, who always reminded me of the miniballs whenever the going got rough.

For John, who patiently listened so often as I babbled about my work that he probably could have written it himself.

And for my fellow History majors, whose stories about their trials and tribulations always made my situation look less daunting.

Thank you.

Introduction

Peering through the second story window of the Museum House on Elfreth's Alley, it is apparent that the sunny skies and warm weather have coaxed people out of their homes and onto the welcoming streets of Philadelphia. On this particular day in May, Elfreth's Alley is no exception; at ten in the morning, the museum has already received phone calls from three schools informing them of their plans to visit that afternoon, while a group of thirty ten year-olds is already poking their noses into alleyways and peering into mail slots as they impatiently wait for the tour guide to open the front door. These children do not realize that although their visit to Elfreth's Alley is simply a brief stop before joining the line of tourists at Independence Hall, the contents of the museum to which they are about to be exposed are part of an ongoing process through which history is constantly re-interpreted to meet the needs and demands of the public.

Administrators of museums, historic sites, and other interpreters of public history have several resources from which to draw to decide how to tell their story: professional associations, public consulting groups, and their own in-house staff. Each of these resources has advantages as well as limitations, but their primary goal is the same: to interpret historical displays such that they are a beneficial educational tool for the public. These resources, though seemingly fighting the same battle, have their own ideas of what constitutes "good" interpretation, as well as their own

programs and publications that serve as the media through which they communicate these ideas. However, in terms of adaptability, these resources lie on opposite ends of the spectrum because what works for one site may not necessarily meet the needs of another.

This exploration of interpretation as seen through the windows of Elfreth's Alley is part of the larger foundation of interpretive theory. Interpretation is vital to every museum's existence because it determines not only what the public is exposed to, but also how this history is conveyed, and, ultimately, whether the museum will survive. The ten year-olds milling about the stoops of Elfreth's Alley are going to be subjected to a version of the Alley's history, and this version is constantly being modified by the tour guides and museum staff with the help of research from public consulting groups and special programming from museum associations. These factors, though invisible to most museum-goers, have a major impact on their experiences in museums. Surreptitious as it may seem, there are in fact underlying motivations for the particular versions of history that are presented in what should be the impartial stage of museums, historic sites, and other public education venues.

While it is easy to assume that interpretation at Elfreth's Alley is conducted in the manner which best benefits the museum's audience, it is important to realize that there are many ideas as to what it means to educate the public via "good" interpretation. While museum associations may support hands-on activities and public consultants suggest the inclusion of women's history, Elfreth's Alley has thirty ten year-olds waiting outside and only twenty minutes in which to inspire them with historical accounts of past inhabitants of our nation's oldest residential street. That tour guide is not concerned with interpretive theory or the political implications of federally funded grants, but with teaching thirty children the importance of a small alley in Philadelphia so that it will not become obscured by images of Benjamin Franklin and the rebellious colonies.

Elfreth's Alley is not alone in its dilemma of interpreting history for presentation to its audience; museums across the country are forced to make decisions on a daily basis that affect the education of the public. However, it is difficult to examine interpretive practices in all museums because different types of museums face different issues. Because Elfreth's Alley is a small house museum, this study will focus on Historic House Museums in the Philadelphia region that face similar issues: Pennsbury Manor, Wyck Home, and Harriton House. These four historic house museums, although of similar size and location, each have a different approach to interpretation. A brief overview of each museum is helpful in understanding the unique issues of interpretation.

Pennsbury Manor, though quite scenic in comparison to Center City Philadelphia, was the country home of one of the most prominent and well-known Philadelphians: William Penn. Completed in 1699, Pennsbury Manor served as Penn's residence in Pennsylvania for the two years he spent in his colony before he was forced to return to England to attend to his personal affairs. Today, Pennsbury Manor has been restored to its seventeenth century grandeur, which is derived from Penn's letters, bank statements, and other written documentation about the manor and the surrounding property. Managed by the William Penn Foundation, Pennsbury has about twenty paid staff members that not only create exhibits and programming, but also care for the gardens and property. Now nestled between a decaying small town and a municipal waste-management plant, it is not easily accessible by public transportation, and is far-distant from the modern tourist beat. Although Pennsbury is much larger than the typical Historic House Museum in Philadelphia, it is the most prominent interpretation of William Penn and the early colonial days of Pennsylvania.

Wyck Home, located in the historic Germantown district of Philadelphia, is a unique compilation of the nine generations of Quakers that lived beneath its roof. Mary Haines, its last inhabitant, donated the house to the Germantown Historical Society in 1976 to preserve and share

its Quaker history with the public. Since that time, the grounds have been restored to their nineteenth century appearance, and the colonial garden attracts some enthusiasts to what would otherwise be a deserted house. Despite its low attendance, Wyck stands as a representation of Quaker familial traditions and their changing relationship with the Germantown and Philadelphia communities. Its challenge is to try to make the historic, upper-class Quaker traditions appealing enough to bring tourists to a modern, mostly non-Quaker, middle-to-lower class, urban location.

Amidst the pillared homes and SUV's that characterize the western suburbs of Philadelphia know as the Main Line, Harriton House stands atop a hill in Bryn Mawr, a lone museum surrounded by the modern world. As the former home of Charles Thompson, Secretary of the Continental Congress, Harriton is the story of Thompson's life and the political issues facing Philadelphia during his tenure. The museum also addresses the history of Bryn Mawr as a community, and highlights its past as an agricultural community. Owned by the township and run by a non-profit organization, Harriton struggles daily to attract visitors other than local schoolchildren and researchers. However, only the curator and one full-time staff member control the daily operations, which makes reaching out beyond the local educational institutions extremely difficult and relatively rare. Yet the preservation of Harriton is vital to the community because it is one of the only places in which the development of the surrounding area from wilderness to city is readily available to the public.

Location, class and religious limitations, accessibility, staffing, and budget – these are issues which can enhance or destroy a museum's success. These three museums are similar to Elfreth's Alley not only because of their classification as Historic House Museums and their relationship to Philadelphia's history, but also because they all must grapple with these same issues of making themselves accessible and attractive to a diverse audience. Elfreth's Alley, located in the Old City

historic district of Philadelphia, is the United States' oldest residential street, having been inhabited since 1702 through the present day. The museum occupies two row houses in the middle of the Alley, and the other twenty or so houses are private residential homes, the exteriors of which have been restored to their eighteenth century façade. The museum on Elfreth's Alley is managed by an elected board of concerned citizens who volunteer their time to the preservation of the museum houses and the Alley as a whole. Only one paid staff member, who receives additional help from work-study students and volunteers, runs the museum itself on a daily basis. Despite the small size of the museum houses, they receive frequent visits from schoolchildren and tourists who wander over from the Liberty Bell or the Betsy Ross House. Inside, visitors learn a brief history of the Alley as well as about past occupants of the houses, architectural alterations, and tidbits about eighteenth century life in this working class neighborhood of Philadelphia.

Like Pennsbury, Wyck, and Harriton, Elfreth's Alley plans exhibits and tours to reach out to its audience and to teach them the history of the Alley, and why it is an important piece of Philadelphia's past. However, the material included in the exhibits and tours is subject to the influences of not only the staff members who create them, but also the museum associations to which they belong; hired professional consultants also contribute to the discussion of what constitutes proper interpretation. Exhibits and tours are also affected by the amount of funding the museum receives because programming changes cannot be made without the money for research, modifying collections, and the manpower necessary to set up the exhibit and re-train tour guides. However, in order to maintain these endowments, the museums must create programs that please the corporations who give them money.

The last quarter of the twentieth century brought about a number of changes in interpretation and museum management. After World War II, preservation of the past became a growing industry

with the development of Williamsburg as a physical specimen of American history. The patriotic feelings of the post-war era continued to swell, and Williamsburg, though actually conceived before the war, became an inspiration to preserve America's past. When examining the dates that many American history museums were established, it is interesting to note that many of them came into existence because of a charitable donation or as a result of the work of concerned citizens in the period after the war and into the 1960s. The late nineteenth century had seen the establishment of many art museums, archaeology museums, and private collections, but the 'history' museum movement flourished after the 1960s. This era was the beginning of the American historical consciousness, and resulted in the birth of many public education venues.

Another period of change arose in the late 1970s in which a movement began to broaden the scope of history, a movement whose repercussions are still being felt today. After World War II, the GI Bill passed by Congress gave veterans and their families access to higher education, a benefit that was widely used by veterans of that war as well as the Korean Conflict and the Vietnam War. These were people that normally would not have gone to college because of their financial constraints, especially after the Great Depression of the 1930s. By the 1970s, these people were graduating from college and graduate programs, and the majority of them were seeking employment as teachers. As a result, there was a surplus of teachers that, by the 1970s, was overflowing into museums.

Previously, museums had been operated by members of the upper classes, who, out of the kindness of their hearts, donated their free time to educating public audiences in the museum setting. The new generation of middle class employees revolutionized the face of museums. These members of the middle and lower classes demanded that their history be presented in museums alongside the history of the upper class whites. Over the next two decades, their efforts would be

intensified to include African-Americans, women, and the working classes. As a result of their efforts, interpretation now focuses on daily life as well as events with momentous historical implications, and even today, museums are trying to create balanced programs that satisfy the needs of their diverse audience.

Elfreth's Alley is one of these museums that is trying to cope with the demands of its audience as well as the limitations of itself as an educational institution. However, there are many options available through which the Alley can update and diversify its exhibits, tours, and programming. Museum associations offer programs to its members through which they can receive grants to fund changes to their interpretation and exhibits. Public consulting groups are available to provide research and guidance to museums and historic sites that wish to change or update their interpretations. Pennsbury, Wyck, and Harriton have adopted different methods of interpretation in their institutions, and as case studies, provide insight into the benefits and limitations of interpretive projects.

Section 1

Objects as History and the Rise of Interpretation

As a visitor enters the museum house on Elfreth's Alley, he is immediately transported back to the eighteenth century by an array of stimulating features, from the dim imitation candle light to the smell of damp wood, that make him question whether the FLASH bus will be waiting to take him to his next tourist stop when he emerges. These features, though in some cases innate to old environments, are a part of the museum's presentation to its audience. At Elfreth's Alley, as with every other museum of material culture, the two main media through which the museum communicates with its audience are through its exhibits and tours, and the ambiance to which the audience is exposed is a part of these media.¹

Although the average visitor rarely questions the method of presentation at Elfreth's Alley, there is actually a tremendous amount of thought put into every exhibit and each story told on the

¹ All information on Elfreth's Alley comes from the author's own knowledge from working in the museum. As a staff member since May 2000, the author has been involved with tours, exhibit design, research, planning special events and fundraisers, grant proposals, and public relations. The author continues to work at Elfreth's Alley at the present time.

guided tour. In the recent past, there has been a change in the attitude towards museum exhibits and tours as a result of changes in audience demands, which have received support from museum associations and public consulting groups. Today's diverse society has consequently affected presentations in museums as the institutions attempt to keep up with the changing educational needs and wants of its audience.

In the past, one of the most difficult problems facing museums was the lack of interpretation of its material culture: the objects were the history. This type of presentation stereotyped museums as rather dull places in which visitors peered at old objects in order to learn about the past. Museums' interpretive theories were influenced by the questions, "Whose history? Who has a right to speak?"² In the past, the answer to these questions was simple, for it had been the answer since the rise of the American historical consciousness during the World War II period: preserve and teach white people's culture. Early museums were created under the pretense of being places that preserved events and people important to the American past, yet these institutions were overwrought by representations of social reform and the culture of the white elite. Throughout the twentieth century, this theme evolved and museums became places that preserved the social evolution of society. However, the exhibits and tours were extremely biased because museums housed the past as created by their founders and funders: white, usually all male groups who had a surplus of money to invest in new enterprises.³ The history that these people chose to represent in their museums was the history of white people and their culture, which was usually portrayed in a manner consistent with past notions of the elite society.

² David William Cohen, "Further Thoughts on the Production of History," Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations, ed. Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 302.

³ Michael J. Ettema, "History Museums and the Culture of Materialism," Past Meets Present, ed. Jo Blatti (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987) 64-66.

Museums were seen as untouchable and unchanging, perhaps as old as the materials contained within their walls. The displays consisted of old artifacts, aging documents, and faded photographs displayed in glass cases or kept out of reach of curious visitors behind ropes where they could be looked at, but not touched.⁴ Although this method of interpretation seems to hinder the visitor's educational experience, some audience members visit museums specifically because they can choose whether or not to make connections and conclusions that tie the object to the broader picture. In a study of museum attendants, one visitor summarized this view by saying that he "valued museums because visitors could observe the artifacts and 'come to some conclusions on your own instead of listening to someone else's tainted conclusions.'" Another visitor said he "trusted museums because by displaying objects 'for everybody to see,' the museum 'isn't trying to present you with any points of view... You need to draw your own conclusions.'"⁵ Despite the lack of historical context, the idea of objects as history is supported by some audience members and is therefore a seemingly valid interpretive method.

Museum professionals support this "hands-off" approach because it meets their need of conveying important aspects of the past to the general public through the display of objects. This interpretive method is called the Formalist Approach because it focuses on the physical form of objects, thereby emphasizing the concrete aspects of history.⁶ These objects portray white people's history, and are used to illustrate aspects of white people's past because "the original purpose of the object-centered approach was to teach genteel values through objects. Curators conducted research on the history of objects in order to identify and highlight their morally desirable qualities."⁷ The

⁴ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, ed., *The Presence of the Past*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 105-108.

⁵ Rosenzweig and Thelen 106.

⁶ Ettema 63.

⁷ Ettema 72.

Formalist Approach is therefore an interpretive theory that reinforces white people's culture and values by displaying their objects.

The Formalist Approach, despite its obvious biases towards white people's history, is still a respected interpretive theory used in many museums today. At Harriton House, the visitor is met at the front door by either a volunteer tour guide or even Bruce Gill, the curator, who gives a short description of Charles Thompson and his duties as Secretary of the Continental Congress as an overview of the house and its affects. The visitor is then allowed to roam through the house at his leisure, which consists of a front room, dining room, kitchen, and two bedrooms upstairs. The small rooms contain furniture, clothing and other objects either owned by Thompson or true to the period. As the visitor wanders through the rooms, there are no placards fixed to the wall to describe the uses of the furniture. This allows the visitor to use his own imagination as to their use and the hardships they suggest, for the sparse furniture and objects of manual labor attest to the time-consuming ways of daily life. The interpretive method at Harriton is such that the objects in the house are meant to show the everyday life of an important political figure in the eighteenth century, which is an application of the Formalist Approach.⁸ While the tour lacks personal attention and a comprehensive identification of objects, the visitor is allowed to immerse himself in the past because he is left to explore this eighteenth century residence and come to his own conclusions about the past as represented by the objects in the house.

Over the last fifteen years, questions have been arising as to the validity of using objects as the sole representation of the past in museums' exhibits and tours. At the same time, museum professionals were beginning to question the entire past as represented in museums because it only encompassed white people's past. In this transitional phase, when museums were uncertain of what

⁸ Bruce Gill, personal interview, 8 February 2002.

or whose history should be displayed, interpretation came to a halt and the objects themselves became the subject of historical representation. Michael Ettema, who was part of a research project in the late 1980s whose focus was interpretive theory in museums, describes the new role of objects in the museums' education of the public as "now consist[ing] in simply learning about the objects themselves;...the medium has, indeed, become the message."⁹ While the popularity of white people's past was sharply declining, there was, as yet, no representation with which museums could replace it. So they were left to wait for the results of scholarly research and audience surveys that would lead to the implementation of new theories and exhibits, and as a result, the objects themselves became the main focus of museum education, telling the story of material progress. Although this was not the intended effect, the change in the definition and conception of "history" and "historical importance" created a period of uncertainty in historical interpretation in which scholars offered little theoretical framework for the interpretation of new material. It was at this juncture that Ettema's classification of objects as history came into existence.

The focus on objects, though containing undercurrents of elitism, is influenced by a moral and political conscious to present the "right" version of the past. As public institutions, museums and historic sites have to be diplomatic in the presentation of their material so as not to offend their audiences and deter future visitors. Historian Michael Frisch has written extensively on the interpretive issues facing museums, and concludes that:

Inordinate emphasis is often placed on the 'script' content and the conceptualization behind it, as if the point were to present the 'right' message to the public, its points illustrated by artifacts, rather than to offer an environment within which historical materials and ideas were discussed 'with' visitors.¹⁰

⁹ Ettema 72.

¹⁰ Michael Frisch, A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990) 243.

Frisch highlights the biggest drawback to using objects as history: without the connection between the object and its society, there is no context in which the audience can put this piece of the past. For example, in the front room of the first museum house at Elfreth's Alley, there is an eighteenth century spinning wheel. Tour guides assume that the visitors know that the spinning wheel was a common possession of families used for making thread. However, the audience is left to come to that conclusion on their own, and they are not forced to think about how time-consuming it was in the eighteenth century to make a dress and how this posed a problem to working class families that lacked free time. This presentation of the object "seems to float in time – unencumbered, unconstrained, and uninstructed by any sense of how it came to be."¹¹ Though a correct representation of the past, the object fails to assist the visitor in putting it in its broader historical context.

Because of the drawbacks of interpretation in this transitional period, a new form of interpretive theory was created, the repercussions of which are still being felt today throughout the museum field. Scholar Thomas Schlereth noted that the objects-as-history approach was not working when he stated, "Over the past two decades, history museums and material culturalists have gradually acknowledged the need to move beyond the simplistic claim that objects were important in and of themselves."¹² Frisch pinpointed the source of discontent when he cited, "Often quite correctly, critics have faulted the museums for having confused cart and horse – for permitting an obligation to display their 'things' to overwhelm interpretation, imprisoning it within airless display cases."¹³ But if objects weren't the source of interpretation, then what was important? The result of scholarly research, museum association polls, and audience assessment was a new form of

¹¹ Frisch 17.

¹² Thomas J. Schlereth, "Museums and Material Culture," *History Museums in the United States*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989) 302.

¹³ Frisch 243.

interpretive theory called the Analytical Perspective. This theory is based on the belief that objects should be used as mirrors that reflect the past, not as representations of that past.

Implementation of the Analytical Perspective has been a slow process because it is difficult for museums and historic sites to change their interpretation overnight. This change is not only time-consuming, but it is also difficult for some institutions to recognize that their interpretation is no longer meeting the needs of their audience. Since the rise of the American historical consciousness in the 1940s, museums have been using objects to represent white people's past, and after this period of consistent interpretation, it is not surprising that museums would be slow to adopt new methods. Frisch summarized the uneasiness with which historical institutions approached the Analytical Perspective as:

This 'new' form of historic site management is not inherently better or worse, in that any interpretive approach can be ludicrous or moving – or both, at different times. The important thing is to understand that current modes of commemoration/interpretation are neither inevitable nor eternal.¹⁴

While it seems that the Analytical Perspective was causing an uproar in the museum community, it was simply the beginning of a new era in which museums were forced to listen to their audience. The purpose of museums and historic sites is to educate the public, and the public began to demand something different from museums and their interpretive policies.

In order to improve their interpretation, museums rely on continuous support from the museum associations to which they are members in order to make their institutions a more effective educational venue. The American Association of Museums (AAM) has arguably the largest constituency among museums in the United States. Founded in 1906 by a group of seventy-one delegates from museums across the country, the AAM was established to serve as the organizational body for museums' common interests. Its founders believed that by working together, they could

¹⁴ Frisch 218.

share information and ideas to improve their own institutions.¹⁵ A museum pays an annual fee to belong to the AAM, and in return has access to a wide variety of programs designed to offer incentives to improve the general quality of museums and historic sites across the nation. Its ultimate mission is “to promote excellence within the museum community...through advocacy, professional education, information exchange, Accreditation, and guidance on current professional standards of performance.”¹⁶ In general, the “excellence” the AAM attempts to promote in displays of public history is not clearly defined. The AAM does not actually conduct programs within its member institutions because it believes that museums have special needs that cannot be met by a single type of programming. Instead, the AAM creates guidelines for its members to implement and follow; in terms of interpretation, the AAM bases its definition on studies of museums and historic sites across the country. Although this approach gives its members freedom when designing their programs, it is difficult to assess the success of the guidelines because they are used in a wide range of programming.

Currently, the AAM is promoting its interpretive theories through its National Interpretation Project (NIP). Begun in 1998, the project was sparked by a survey in which a large proportion of AAM members admitted that their institutions had never actually addressed the issue of interpretation. The NIP was not designed as a grant program to re-interpret selected institutions; its goal was to examine a select group of museums and historic sites to create a set of guidelines for interpretation that its members could then apply to their own institutions.¹⁷ The Project Advisory Committee chose thirty-six Accredited museums and closely examined their interpretations to

¹⁵ The American Association of Museums, Frequently Asked Questions Page, 10 April 2002 <<http://www.aam-ua.org/aamfaqs.htm>>.

¹⁶ The American Association of Museums, About AAM Page, 24 January 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/about.htm>>.

¹⁷ The American Association of Museums, National Interpretation Project: Overview Page, 2 February 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/NIPoverview.htm>>.

create a set of performance measures entitled “Characteristics of Exemplary Interpretation.”¹⁸ The AAM plans to promote these characteristics as a guideline for interpretation in all of its member institutions.

The AAM established a specific definition of interpretation to serve as a guideline for evaluating its participants’ interpretive practices. For the NIP, interpretation was defined as:

The media/activities through which a museum carries out its mission and education role. Interpretation is a dynamic process of communication between the museum and the audience. Interpretation is the means by which the museum delivers its content. Interpretation media/activities include but are not limited to: exhibits, tours, web sites, classes, school programs, publications, [and] outreach.¹⁹

This working definition of interpretation is important to the NIP because it defines in unambiguous terms the activities that the AAM considers to be interpretative in nature. Although this definition only identifies the activities that are interpretive, it lays the groundwork for a coherent study of interpretive practices.

By April 1999, a preliminary set of characteristics was developed as a result of the research from the NIP. Exemplary interpretation was seen to have three characteristics: strategy/content, enabling factors, and access/delivery.²⁰ The strategy for a museum with exemplary interpretation:

Has a clear statement that describes the purpose of their interpretation, relates it to the mission and describes its goals and methods; has evidence of effective interpretive planning; has broadly stated values; takes its educational role seriously; [and] involves its community.²¹

The content:

Demonstrates knowledge of the subject; selects content carefully and conscientiously; reflects the complexities of a changing community; declares its point of view; makes content relevant and part of a broader, contemporary dialogue; [and] engages in important issues.²²

¹⁸ The American Association of Museums, National Interpretation Project: Status Report Page, 2 February 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/NIPapril.htm>>.

¹⁹ The AAM, Overview.

²⁰ The American Association of Museums, Characteristics of Exemplary Interpretation: A Working Document Page, 2 February 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/NIPchex.htm>>.

²¹ The AAM, Characteristics.

²² The AAM, Characteristics.

For enabling factors, a museum with exemplary interpretation:

Demonstrates internal clarity, agreement, and attention to the interpretive philosophy; views interpretation as an ongoing responsibility; sets goals for individual interpretive programs; holds cross-institutional discussions; employs learning theory and educational research; uses evaluation; knows its audiences; [and] creates a continuing relationship between the museum and its audiences(s).²³

The Access/Delivery component is met by an institution that:

Provides multiple levels and points of entry: intellectual, cultural, individual, group, etc.; has inviting design in the presentation of ideas, concepts, and objects; is guided by the overall interpretive philosophy; creates a bridge between the audience and the content; expresses a clear idea, or set of ideas, and those ideas are apparent to the audience; [and] uses interpretive media/activities that are appropriate for the goals, content, and audience.²⁴

These characteristics, although somewhat general, can be adapted by a museum of any size and resource level. This means that the NIP was successful, at least in the preliminary findings, in creating a set of standards that all AAM members can strive to achieve in terms of their interpretive policies.

One drawback to the AAM and its NIP is that the AAM has no power to enforce its beliefs upon its members. The guidelines created by the NIP are merely recommendations to member institutions as to how interpretation should be conducted, but there are no consequences for museums that choose not to follow these guidelines. This means that although the AAM is working to support its members in their attempts to improve their interpretation, the association cannot force its members to adopt its ideology. A second drawback is that these guidelines that seek to set high standards also have the effect of narrowing the vision of ‘proper interpretation,’ offering legitimacy to ‘museum professionals,’ and denigrating the talented and creative ‘amateur.’

While the NIP was an important step towards improving interpretation at AAM member

²³ The AAM, Characteristics.

²⁴ The AAM, Characteristics.

institutions, access to the project's findings is quite limited. The AAM website is perhaps the easiest way to access information about the AAM and the NIP; however, the interpretive guidelines created from the project can only be purchased from the AAM Bookstore for ninety dollars.²⁵ Although both members and non-members can obtain the report, Historic House Museums with limited funding cannot afford to buy the results of every project sponsored by the AAM, which limits their access to the AAM's resources. Using the internet, these same sites can access a large majority of the information on the AAM's activities, which allows them to put their limited resources towards more pressing issues in their institutions.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is another association that supports interpretative policies in its member institutions through private funding. The National Trust was begun in 1949 by members of the American Preservation Movement as a federally funded organization to acquire and administer historic sites. Although it is no longer supported by government money, the National Trust continues to work with sites that have been placed under its protection. These are sites that are in danger of being shut down because of financial difficulties or destroyed by building projects in the community. The National Trust uses money from membership as well as private donations to support those institutions that have been placed under its protection.²⁶ The National Trust uses this money for site management and administrative purposes as opposed to sponsoring large projects or programs. Although the National Trust does work with its protectorates on creating policies and programs, the major decisions are actually made by the museum's staff and board of directors using only input and suggestions from the National Trust.

²⁵ The American Association of Museums, Bookstore Page, 10 April 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/bookstore.htm>>.

²⁶ The National Trust for Historic Preservation, History of the National Trust Page, 7 February 2002 <http://www.nthp.org/about_the_trust/history.html>.

This detached yet obviously involved relationship separates the work of the National Trust from the less imposing projects and suggested guidelines from the AAM.

The collection of twenty-one historic sites that are under the protection of the National Trust receive various amounts of funding and administrative assistance. The majority of these sites are small House Museums and other size-challenged sites.²⁷ These sites request help from the National Trust for a variety of reasons having to do with their site's existence being threatened. The amount of involvement ranges from coordinating professional management to sponsoring education and interpretive training sessions for the staff to paying the bills.²⁸ The National Trust purposely designed this program to be flexible so that it can be adapted to the needs of each specific site.

Although the National Trust is more committed to saving and restoring historic places, interpretation has become an important part of its mission at its protected sites. This is shown by the National Trust's current work to develop an interpretive plan for its sites. Max van Balgooy, the director of the National Trust, revealed this project, though still in its research phase, whereby the administrators and staff of the National Trust are collecting data on effective interpretation from scholarly works, museum association publications, and from the practices of museums and historic sites. Currently, data is still being collected, so the National Trust has not yet drawn any conclusions from this project or released a preliminary report of its findings.²⁹ However, the National Trust's initiative in creating interpretive guidelines attests to the importance of interpretation to a site, including its administrative managers.

While it is refreshing that the National Trust is willing to extend its duties beyond administration to include interpretation, their work has little, if any, effect on sites that are not under

²⁷ The National Trust, History.

²⁸ Sandy Lloyd, "Re: Questions," e-mail to the author, 31 January 2002.

²⁹ Max van Balgooy, "Re: Interpretation at National Trust historic sites," e-mail to the author, 25 January 2002.

its management. Because the National Trust's main beneficiaries are its protectorates, it is only these institutions that will benefit directly from the findings of its study of interpretation. While other members of the National Trust will be able to obtain the official report, the National Trust will not oversee any of these changes in their institutions. Although this project will surely benefit its protectorates, the National Trust is not actively molding interpretation in the larger historical community.

The research done by the AAM and the National Trust, then, has brought about new thinking, though on a limited scale. In addition to the changes in the way objects were used in museum exhibits and tours, the new Analytical Perspective also changed the content of the museums. This new twist was a direct result of the changing definition of 'historical importance,' a question to which the audience was responding with demands for their own history to be a part of museums. As a result, along with the Analytical Perspective came another shift, though this time it was away from famous people and important events towards the inclusion of ordinary people and everyday life.

To expand or enhance its interpretation, then, Elfreth's Alley has only a limited array of resources. Elfreth's Alley has not significantly changed its interpretation in response to the Analytical Perspective. The museum continues to use its objects to tell about its past inhabitants, as the objects-as-history approach has never been fully utilized. A visitor is told the story of the occupants of the house whose period of residence is on display. Although some visitors ask direct questions about the objects, the tour focuses on the people and what their lives tell about the past. Therefore the museum's interpretation did not require modification with the advent of the Analytical Perspective.

Section 2

Shifting the Focus: Museums and Ordinary People

At the same time that the Analytical Perspective was taking root in museums and historic sites, a new movement was beginning in which there was a demand for the history of ordinary people to be represented alongside that of Benjamin Franklin and the Continental Congress. At Elfreth's Alley, the staff desired to address the lives of the German immigrants who frequently occupied the Alley as tenants, as well as the free black tailor who lived and worked on the Alley. But these people had not previously been discussed; many in the audience were only interested in hearing about important people and the heroic deeds they accomplished. However, as museum professionals began to re-examine the content of their sites and question their representation of the past, historians, museums professionals, and visitors alike challenged the decision to omit ordinary people from public history displays. By the 1990s, this movement was in full throttle because the diverse audiences were demanding that their history, be it black or white, male or female, American or immigrant, ordinary or extraordinary, be interpreted by and represented in museums.

Although museums were motivated to expand their interpretive scope because of audience demands, it was also for their own survival. Museum attendance began to decline as the public's worship of upper-class people and things began to diminish, and museum professionals realized that they would have to change their interpretation to appeal to broader audiences or they would go out of business. The public's declining interest caused corporations and other private donors to decrease their contributions or, in some extreme cases, cease donating entirely. Decreased endowments left some institutions with barely enough funds to survive, much less with enough money to launch an interpretive overhaul of their institutions. Amusement museums like Disney World and Epcot Center became big attractions, and the opening of Six Flags Great Adventure drew large crowds of visitors because of its entertainment value. Traditional museums and historic sites could not compete with the thrill rides of their competition, and were therefore forced to make drastic interpretive changes to improve their institutions and increase attendance.

While it seems rather dull to study the everyday lives of ordinary people in museums, it is a method through which audience members can connect to a museum's subject matter, thereby creating a better medium through which they can learn. Historian Michael Frisch agrees that the history of ordinary people serves a valuable purpose because:

History programs have been deficient to the extent they have focused on parochial celebrations and that quality may be obtained by finding ways to shift the emphasis to a broader humanistic exploration of values...Humanists ought to be more aggressive or less reticent about pushing for such broader exploration and funding agencies like the state humanities councils ought to be more insistent that proposals transcend the narrowly celebratory.³⁰

While it easy to find museums that teach about famous people, battles, and political events, these experiences have little in relation to most people. However, standing in the kitchen at Harriton House, a visitor is confronted with a room that looks nothing like his kitchen with its electric

³⁰ Frisch 183.

appliances, bright lighting, and fancy cabinets. Everything in the room is a replication of original objects, so visitors are free to handle the appliances and, in the early 1990s, they were even allowed to prepare food using eighteenth century tools and techniques. A housewife might appreciate her free time that is only available because of modern appliances, while a ten year-old might wonder what they would eat for an after-school snack since there was no microwave in which they could cook.³¹ These connections, small as they may be, allow the audience to relate the past to their own lives, which makes the material not only more interesting, but also more readily learned and remembered in the long run.

As the focus of museums gradually expanded to include ordinary people, the Formalist Approach no longer created a dynamic, exciting atmosphere in which the audience could learn. “Accordingly, feverish imagination has been devoted to opening the museum so that new ideas, values, and subject matter might ventilate the intellectual space of the exhibit.”³² The product of this academic zeal was the new theory of historical interpretation discussed previously called the Analytical Perspective, which:

Attempts to teach not just what happened, but how and why it happened...In this view, interpretation situates objects in a context of ideas, values, and other social circumstances of their time...Therefore, collections are tools for teaching a more general history that focuses on the dynamics of past societies. Objects are the props, not the message.³³

This idea that museums should focus less on objects and more on the story of the greater context was reinforced by this shift towards the inclusion of ordinary people. The objects that were displayed in museums could be used as a representation of the people who used them; ordinary items like the spinning wheel at Elfreth’s Alley told the story not only of the house’s occupants, but also of the working class families that had to make their clothes because of financial constraints.

³¹ Gill.

³² Frisch 243.

³³ Ettema 63.

This interpretation of objects allowed museums to tell stories about the people who once used them, and the objects reflected a past that was both interesting to and appreciated by wider audiences.

Wyck Home was, from its creation, designed as a place in which the history of ordinary people could be displayed. Mary Haines, who donated it to the Germantown Historical Society in 1976, specified in her will that the house “be operated as an open house. An exhibit of the furniture, the books, the family china, silver and glassware – but above all symbolic of the dreams and the virtues of those who have gone before.”³⁴ In the almost three centuries that the house had been standing, nine generations of Quakers had inhabited the premises, leaving behind their furniture, diaries, letters, clothing, and countless other possessions that represent their lives. These things have been saved by successive generations of family members not only for reasons of frugality, but for preservation of their family history as well. Although the family was rather well off, they were not famous by any means, other than perhaps by way of their reputation as good people within the Quaker community.

Today, Wyck is a museum about these Quakers, with each room consisting of an assortment of objects from every generation. Because there is a vast amount of historical information on the house’s inhabitants, the tours cater to the visitors’ interests. The tour guide begins by asking the visitor a few questions about his interests and hobbies so that the guide can share aspects of the family that pertain to these interests. For example, an avid dish collector will be sure to learn about the sets of china in the kitchen while a book collector will receive information about the family’s reading and writing habits. School groups are taught about the Quakers’ pacifist beliefs via a discussion of a bloodstain that remains on the floor of the foyer because the house was used to shelter and treat the wounded during the Battle of Germantown. Garden enthusiasts are shown

³⁴ W. Edmunds Clause, Wyck: The Story of an Historic House 1690-1970 (Philadelphia: Mary T. Haines, 1970) 182.

around the grounds and the restored nineteenth century garden while the story of Jane Reuben and her involvement with the horticulture society is shared.³⁵ By using objects to tell the story of the past inhabitants of Wyck, the museum is using the Analytical Perspective to branch out and tell interesting stories about ordinary people.

Although Benjamin Franklin and Betsy Ross still reign over Philadelphia's history, there has been an overwhelming demand for exhibits on the working class and other ordinary people from the past. According to historians and curators James Horton and Spencer Crew:

Until recently, most historical institutions focused on a very narrow segment of history. They concentrated on major military campaigns, historic events, famous historical figures, or highly crafted historical artifacts. With few exceptions, they had little interest in the everyday life or the material culture of common folk. This tradition reflected the notion that only the extraordinary was worthy of preservation; the battlefield, the homes of the wealthy and politically influential. As this tradition has changed in historical scholarship, it has affected and is changing the nation's museums.³⁶

Horton and Crew highlight the fact that the transition from important events to ordinary life is still taking place today, even though more than a decade has passed since the Analytical Perspective was first introduced. Indeed, the process of changing interpretation from major historical events to everyday life has been a slow one, for it requires time to do new research and the money to implement the exhibition and programmatic changes. However, museums are receiving help from both museum associations and public consulting groups that not only assist them in creating new programs, but also provide the funding they need to implement these changes.

Public consulting groups are important contributors to the success of interpretive shifts in museums and historic sites. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) is the largest public consulting group in the nation. Created in 1965, NEH is an independent grant-making

³⁵ Jeff Groff, personal interview, 17 October 2001.

³⁶ James Oliver Horton and Spencer R. Crew, "Afro-Americans and Museums: Towards a Policy of Inclusion," History Museums in the United States, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989) 217.

agency funded by the federal government. It was created to support research, education, preservation, and public programs in order to promote history, thought, and culture in American society. NEH is run by a chairman and a board who are appointed by the President of the United States and confirmed by the Senate, which means that there is a great deal of political influence over their activities. The work of the NEH is carried out in states by their own Humanities Councils who are responsible for the distribution of funds and the coordination of projects. However, institutions, Humanities Councils, or private citizens can apply to the NEH for grants for their own personal projects, so the scope of the NEH is, in fact, limitless. The NEH cooperates a great deal with scholars and historians on individual projects, and often hires them as consultants for sites participating in Council-sponsored programs.³⁷ The NEH is an organization that benefits the public because it uses government money and immense cooperation to improve cultural institutions across the country.

While it seems that museums would have to undergo a complete overhaul in order to shift their focus from famous to common people, some museums were actually created to preserve and celebrate the lives of ordinary people. Wyck Home, established to preserve the history of the nine generations of Quakers that inhabited the house, has always been focused on these ‘ordinary’ people. Therefore, its discussion of these Quakers in relation to the Germantown community did not need modification as the incorporation of ordinary people became more popular.³⁸ Pennsbury Manor, on the other hand, was created as a representation of William Penn’s life in Philadelphia. However, Penn did not live alone; the movement to include ordinary people forced Pennsbury to recognize the contributions of the other inhabitants of the manor including his wife and their slaves.

³⁷ The National Endowment for the Humanities, Overview, 11 April 2002
<<http://www.neh.gov/whoweare/overview.html>>.

³⁸ Groff, Interview.

While it has been an extensive process for Pennsbury to convert its interpretation, it has created a more truthful depiction of life at Pennsbury.³⁹

To encourage institutions to broaden their scope and interpret the lives of common people, museum associations provide a reward system for their members that best meet these changing needs of the public. The AAM's Accreditation Program recognizes member institutions that have re-interpreted their materials to provide exemplary exhibits on both ordinary and famous people. Begun in June 1971, Accreditation had become the watermark of the AAM; Accredited museums are members of the AAM whose programs "reflect, reinforce, and promote the best practices," and the award is a symbol of the excellence they have achieved.⁴⁰ There are only about seven hundred fifty Accredited sites, and each has to undergo a subsequent review every ten years in order to maintain this distinguished honor. The main goal behind the Accreditation Program is to encourage teamwork within its member institutions that will subsequently strengthen their goals, mission, and priorities.⁴¹

While the process of earning Accreditation is fairly complicated, the most important aspect is that those institutions that wish to be Accredited must undergo rigorous inspection by their peers. This means that all aspects of these museums, including interpretation, will be closely examined by a group of their colleagues and fellow AAM members. Therefore, if an institution wants to earn Accreditation, their interpretive policies must follow the general interpretive guidelines set forth by the AAM. Because the AAM requires that these institutions' interpretations follow its guidelines, Accreditation helps to force the inclusion of ordinary people into its members' programming.

³⁹ Mary Ellyn Kunz, personal interview, 2 November 2001.

⁴⁰ The American Association of Museums, Accreditation Page, 2 February 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/accredproginfo.htm>>.

⁴¹ The AAM, Accreditation.

Like the AAM, the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) also has a reward system through which it encourages its members to modify their interpretive policies. The AASLH began in 1904 as a department within the American Historical Association, and became an independent organization in 1940. The organization's purpose was to provide leadership for its members and the field at large by running conferences and workshops and sponsoring awards. The AASLH also represents the museum field on national boards and committees including National History Day and the National Historic Publications and Records Commission.⁴² The motivation for the Awards Program is similar to that of Accreditation:

The American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) conducts its Annual Awards Program to establish and encourage standards of excellence in the collection, preservation, and interpretation of state and local history throughout the United States. By publicly recognizing excellent achievements, the Association strives to inspire others.⁴³

The "standards of excellence" are based upon the goals and ethics established by the AASLH, as discussed in section one. Those institutions that implement programs using policies that exemplify the ideology and methodology of the AASLH are rewarded for their work. Although these institutions only receive recognition from the Awards Program, the AASLH believes that this recognition by their peers will encourage other institutions to better themselves using the guidelines and programs sponsored by the AASLH.

The Tri-State Coalition of Historic Places, in contrast to the broad span and large constituency of national associations like the AAM and the AASLH, exists for the benefit of museums and historic sites in the tri-state area. The organization itself is not very large, and because of its small size things like 'permanent staff' and 'consistent funding' are not part of its

⁴² The American Association for State and Local History, Overview Page, 10 April 2002
<<http://www.aaslh.org/whoweare.htm>>.

⁴³ The American Association for State and Local History, AASLH Awards Program Page, 11 February 2002
<<http://www.aaslh.org/Awards2001.htm>>.

vocabulary. But despite these drawbacks, the Coalition still provides interpretive support for its members. Although it seems that a small association like the Coalition could not compete with large organizations like the AAM in terms of programming options and interpretive guidelines, the Coalition has a more personal relationship with its members because of its small size. The Coalition is also a localized association, which makes it better prepared to deal with regional trends and problems. As a result, its programming is, for the most part, useful to all of its members because their close proximity faces them with similar issues that warrant similar solutions.⁴⁴

The Coalition was established about ten years ago because of a growing concern over the intentions of the people making programming decisions for historic sites in the tri-state area. According to Jeff Groff, co-founder and previous co-chair, different associations, grant sponsors, and even public officials were “trying to speak for us, get funding for us, or characterize us or our needs.”⁴⁵ Jeff and a few other curators of small museums decided to form a group that would represent sites in Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, a group that would be the unified voice of these institutions. Today, the Coalition represents about two hundred fifty historic sites in the region, and has between seventy-five and eighty-five institutional members. These sites vary in size, budget, and management, but their location in the tri-state region poses similar problems that the Coalition can address because it is run by museum professionals that work within the region.⁴⁶

Because of the small size of the Coalition, it has a limited number of programs for its members. Its major programming features are joint workshops with other organizations and a monthly newsletter on current museum and historic issues. Currently, the Coalition is working to develop theme tours at institutions in the region, which would serve as a unifying program to link

⁴⁴ Jeff Groff, e-mail to the author, 11 February 2002.

⁴⁵ Jeff Groff, e-mail to the author, 15 February 2002.

⁴⁶ Groff, 15 Feb.

sites together for greater audience awareness and participation. The Coalition hopes that theme tours would help bring publicity to those institutions that are less known by advertising their institutions at participating sites.⁴⁷ For example, a women's history theme would allow one site to recommend to its visitors a more obscure institution that is also conducting tours with a women's history theme. In this way, audience members can be directed to other sites of interest that are participating in the theme tour. The Coalition believes that this will encourage cooperation, rather than individualism, as a way to use strength in numbers to improve the already precarious status of their museums.

The most prominent piece of interpretive programming produced by the Coalition is a published brochure entitled, *Best Practices and Standards for Historic Site Administration*.⁴⁸ Although the publication does not contain a specific methodology or policy for interpretation at historic sites, it does site “the need to provide factual but interesting interpretation – stories of life and people, not just recitation of architectural or furniture details.”⁴⁹ This classification of interpretation emphasizes the shift to the Analytical Perspective and the need to give exhibits a human aspect, a person to which the visitor can relate the past. *Best Standards* provides this philosophy as the method for how historic sites should present themselves to the public, and the Coalition encourages these interpretive practices through workshops and grants from the Heritage Investment Program. These programs can be used to fund plans, create innovative tours (the most recent trend is the virtual tour), and assess the needs and success of an institution's various

⁴⁷ Groff, 15 Feb.

⁴⁸ This publication is no longer being printed, so the information regarding its content was received from Jeff Groff, one of the authors.

⁴⁹ Groff, 15 Feb.

programs.⁵⁰ *Best Standards*, although only accessible to a limited group of institutions, is a useful tool for implementing new interpretive ideas.

Created as a voice for historic sites in the tri-state area, the Coalition has managed to influence interpretive programming to fit the needs of audiences and institutions in the area. Because it was founded by people like Jeff Groff who actually work in museums in the region, the organization has been able to draw on its members' daily experiences to create a philosophy for museum practices and a standard of excellence. Although only a few programs are available, the Coalition uses its limited resources well in terms of influencing museum interpretation in the tri-state area.

Elfreth's Alley is one of many museums in the region that has used its interpretive policies to tell the story of the working class people who lived on the Alley in the past. The first museum house is set up as it might have looked in 1752 when two women lived in the two and a half story row house. The bedroom on the second floor contains, among other things, a quilt with the initials M.S. for Mary Smith, who was the owner of the house at the time. Having one of Mary Smith's personal affects makes her the connection between the objects in the museum and the past. This exhibit helps visitors learn a little know fact that women could own property in the eighteenth century, a fact that is often overlooked in displays of famous women, unless that particular female owned property. Despite skepticism that the shift to ordinary people would make the museum experience less interesting, Elfreth's Alley proves that the past, as it relates to ordinary people, is no less informative or educational for the audience.

Historian Paul Boyer claims the change in museums and historic sites is "part of a much broader process whereby an older historiography that had focused mainly on elites – whether

⁵⁰ Groff, 15 Feb.

political, military, social, intellectual, or cultural – gave way to a ‘new social history’ more attuned to the experiences of ordinary people...”⁵¹ However, along with the transition away from famous people and important events came a new notion of telling everyone’s history, and not just that of the dominant white male society. This trend has been gathering momentum over that last decade, causing more changes to be made in interpretive theory that now allow “other” histories to be included at museums and historic sites.

⁵¹ Paul Boyer, “Whose History is it Anyway?,” History Wars, ed. Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996) 130.

Section 3

Adding New Histories: Women and African-Americans

Besides being a museum that preserves the history of working class people, Elfreth's Alley has tried to tell the stories of all of its past occupants, regardless of gender, race, or political affiliation. Upon entering the first museum house, the visitor is confronted with the shop of a mantua maker, who made dresses for wealthy women. The shop is unique because it was not only run by two single females, but it was owned by one of them, as discussed in Section two. It is only because of the property and fire insurance records that the story of the mantua makers is known; countless other histories of the Alley have been lost because they were not preserved in writing. This is a result of the mentality of eighteenth century society, who mainly saved documents and buildings that played a role in events of historical significance. As a result, white male history is more readily available in comparison to that of women and African-Americans because of societal biases against these members.

Today, these societal prejudices have been reduced by Affirmative Action and the Civil Rights Movement, yet many museums' contents are still sexually and racially biased towards white males. This fact is not surprising because it is often difficult to locate credible historical evidence

of the lives of women and African-Americans because American society was male-dominated, which caused these minorities to be overlooked by those bent on glorifying the past. In the eighteenth century, society was subjected to a hierarchy that placed white males in an authoritative position, while both women and blacks were treated as subordinate members of society. As a result, the lives ordinary women and African-Americans were not often documented because their history was not thought to be beneficial for future generations. Museums today are a prime example of their omission from history because most institutions lack exhibits pertaining to the everyday lives of women and African-Americans.

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, the portrayal of women and African-Americans has been changing in museums and historic sites. The change was sparked by the expansion of museums' material from famous people and important events to ordinary life. As the histories of working and lower class white males began appearing in museum exhibits and tours, a larger proportion of the audience was able to examine its own past in the educational context of museums. Despite this wider scope of museum interpretation and inclusion, women and African-Americans were still absent from many institutions. By the late 1980s, these groups began voicing their concerns, and, as audience members, began demanding that their past be represented in museums along with everyone else's.

The general constitution and attitude of scholars has changed as well, so that public consulting groups, which now include women and other minorities, are supporting museums in their efforts to expand their interpretation to include women, African-Americans, and others whose voices have been unheard. They, too, feel the need to diverge from the white male past, and, in fact, emphasize the need for a more diverse history. Historian Jo Blatti agrees with this trend towards including women and minorities in museums because:

Right now, for instance, the question that we – scholars and citizens alike – are asking of our past is how we can develop a historical understanding that accommodates greatly expanded definitions of a multicultural society. That means we tend to look at a ‘George Washington’ site, likely to have been developed in the late nineteenth century or first third of the twentieth century, wanting to know about the rest of the cast – women, blacks, soldiers, children – who may have been present as well.⁵²

Blatti’s statement re-emphasizes the point that for the most part, American society has ignored certain aspects of our past in museum representation. Women, for example, were rarely portrayed in museums because their lives were believed to be of little historical importance in comparison to the white male political figures and activists of their time period. This conception of women earned them a place of little historical exposure in the background of male histories. Slaves were another group omitted by most museums because they, like women, did not have a significant role in what were deemed historically important events. Despite the fact that they were the backbone of the southern economy, only slaves like Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas, who disrupted white society, were portrayed in museums. However, today’s society is much more diverse and equal, and this equality demands that all constituents of society be represented in museums. As a result, museums are “looking to develop a historical understanding that accommodates [these] greatly expanded definitions of a multicultural society.” This revolution, as it may be, has greatly changed the nature of interpretive policies from the standpoint of public consulting groups because their theories must now include a larger variety of histories.

Although the idea of including women and African-Americans in museums appeals to many people, it is often difficult to uncover research about these groups since their lives were often not well documented. The most abundant information on women, according to historian Barbara Melosh, is that of political women, whose issues led them into the public spotlight. Reform movements received the most documentation because women were leaving their private sector in

⁵² Jo Blatti, introduction, Past Meets Present, ed. by Jo Blatti (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987) 4.

the home to publicly advocate for the rights of themselves, the lower classes, and other groups whose voices were being ignored by the rest of society. Another popular topic in museums is the women who fought against the gender barriers of their society to become successful in “male” occupations.⁵³ The lives of these women are described in a most inspiring story that promises power and money to women who are willing to shed their femininity and brave the harshness of the male professions. Although these inspiring stories demonstrate the gains that women have made since the winning of the Women’s Suffrage Movement, they completely ignore women who did not stray from their gender roles and lived under the constraints of their time, or who expanded those roles in more subtle ways – as homeowners, business owners, artists, or writers.

While a great deal of information has surfaced concerning women’s role in the home, childrearing, and other elements of daily life, there has been very little discussion of certain topics that have been labeled “Women’s Issues.” Birth control, abortion, and domestic violence are a few Women’s Issues that are usually absent from museum interpretation. Public institutions are often uncertain of how to deal with these sensitive and often controversial subjects, which has caused a reversal in museums’ interpretive policies. Often, it is easier to deal with the unladylike activities of eighteenth century female abolitionists than to discuss topics such as birth control and abortion during that period.⁵⁴ These topics are seen as taboo for public discussion because Women’s Issues are viewed as private matters best kept private. And for now, these issues are being ignored in museums despite the fact that interpretive policies are being modified to incorporate women and their past.

⁵³ Barbara Melosh, “Speaking of Women,” *History Museums in the United States*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989) 188.

⁵⁴ Melosh 205.

African-American history has also been marginalized by museums and historic sites not only because of museums' tendency to cater towards more popular histories, but also because of the lack of information. Like women's history, African-American inclusion in museums has faced similar problems as a result of poor documentation, and "despite efforts, the scarcity of funds and the influence of traditional museum practice encouraged black preservationists to focus on the lives and activities of black notables."⁵⁵ While African-American representation began with the portrayal of famous activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, these exhibits were not appropriate subject matter for all historic institutions. The inclusion of black history, therefore, had to wait for the shift towards portraying ordinary people, which was a long, slow process. Until institutions were able, and willing, to research their own African-American past, whether it consisted of free blacks or slaves, black history was forced to remain separated from broader historical representation at museums and historic sites.

Researching African-American ties specific to a museum's period and content requires the assistance of scholars and public consulting groups to help research and design new African-American exhibits, but both of these groups cost money. According to a study done by historians James Horton and Spencer Crew:

Some professional staffs are producing scholarship, [while] others, particularly those at smaller museums, are so pressed with the daily institutional duties that research and writing are all but impossible...Several respondents explained they lacked funds to maintain an adequate institutional library and depended upon limited and sometimes inaccessible public facilities...Several such museums expressed an interest in expanding their holdings and exhibitions in black history, but they needed financial and scholarly assistance.⁵⁶

In this case, the problem is not that museums are unwilling to display African-American history, but that small museums lack the scholarly tools and funding to conduct such research on their own. As

⁵⁵ Horton and Crew 218.

⁵⁶ Horton and Crew 225.

a result, the inclusion of African-American history in many museums and historic sites has been a slow process that is dependent upon donations of time and money to those institutions that wish to expand their interpretation but cannot afford to do so.

The needs of these institutions have not gone unheard; the Pennsylvania Humanities Council (PHC) sponsored an interpretation project whose goal was to help museums and historic sites in the Philadelphia area expand their interpretations. The PHC operates throughout the state of Pennsylvania as an organizer and promoter of the humanities. It is one of the rare associations that does not require membership in exchange for participation in its programs. Based in Philadelphia, the PHC is a state-run organization that is part of the Federal-State Partnership of the National Endowment for the Humanities, which was discussed in section two. Their mission is to “strengthen communities by fostering lifelong learning in our cultural traditions through public programs that renew our memories and ideals.”⁵⁷ The “culture” the PHC attempts to teach the community comes from the humanities field, which includes history, literature, philosophy, art history and criticism, religion, languages, anthropology, archaeology, and any other subject material that relates to the study of mankind.⁵⁸ By working with organizations that relate to these fields, the PHC “fosters” learning within the state of Pennsylvania.

Although the PHC’s scope covers a broad range of subjects, they are able to deal with the specific problems that face each field of study. They employ various methods of teaching including offering speakers on particular topics free of charge, giving grants to organizations for the creation of new educational programs, holding local book discussion groups, and by addressing the issues that are raised in today’s study of the humanities.⁵⁹ Their recent project in museum interpretation,

⁵⁷ The Pennsylvania Humanities Council, About Us Page, 1 February 2002 <<http://www.pahumanities.org/about.php>>.

⁵⁸ The PHC, About Us.

⁵⁹ The PHC, About Us.

called *Raising Our Sites*, has greatly changed the public face of Pennsylvania's museums and historic sites. Over a period of approximately nine years, the PHC worked with a select group of museums, historic sites, and scholars to create new programs that moved away from the Formalist Approach to include people and events from group in society. *Raising Our Sites* is a prime example of the shift towards the Analytical Perspective and the integration of women and African-Americans into museums.

Raising Our Sites was a project that occupied the PHC for almost a decade, consisting of two phases that ran from 1992 until 2001. When the concept for *Raising Our Sites* was initially created, Phase I was actually the entire project. Subtitled *Women's History in Pennsylvania*, Phase I was the first collaborative effort in the country to strengthen the representation of women in museums and historic sites. The project assigned a scholar or historian to each of the participating sites so that new research and programming ideas could be developed to expand the institution's interpretation to include women's history. Phase I lasted from 1992 to 1996, and attempted to alleviate the under-representation of women in public displays of history. During the course of Phase I, research revealed a lack of African-American and lower class histories in the participating sites. Phase II's *Community Histories of Pennsylvania* was an expansion of the original project that ran from 1997-2001 and focused on the laborers and lower class members of the community whose stories had not been told previously. Phase II also created an evaluation to collect visitor responses to new programs and exhibits so that the sites could continue to assess the needs of their audiences and provide a dynamic and engaging program even after the completion of the *Raising Our Sites* project.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ The Pennsylvania Humanities Council, *Raising Our Sites: Final Report for The William Penn Foundation*, Submitted by the PHC on 2 February 2001, 1.

The project was funded through a combination of private, state, federal, and individual sources. The original project, consisting solely of Phase I, was funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the umbrella organization in which the PHC represents Pennsylvania. Phase II was funded by a variety of sources including the William Penn Foundation, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and a number of anonymous donors.⁶¹ Because the PHC is a non-profit organization, all of the money they received was used to fund *Raising Our Sites* and aid the participants in their re-interpretation. Participation in *Raising Our Sites* was completely voluntary, and the participants were chosen by an application process. Twenty-three sites were chosen, of which seven were located in the Delaware Valley region; the same twenty-three sites were invited to participate in Phase II, and only one museum declined the offer.⁶²

Although the basic purpose for each of the two phases of *Raising Our Sites* has already been described, the PHC did have broader goals for the entire project. The PHC wanted not only to create better interpretive practices in its participants, but it also wanted to establish a more permanent process through which museums and historical sites could continue to re-interpret their materials even after the project ended. The ultimate goals for *Raising Our Sites* were:

Fostering collaborative relationships between staff at historic sites and scholars; forming a network among participants for the purpose of resource-sharing; and providing organizations with evaluative resources to examine more fully the impact of an expanded interpretive shift on audience development.⁶³

Raising Our Sites was designed to encourage collaboration between the sites and their scholars. The PHC hoped to create a working relationship that would survive beyond the project's completion, thereby giving the participants resources for future interpretive endeavors.

⁶¹ The PHC, [Final Report 1](#).

⁶² The PHC, [Final Report 1](#).

⁶³ The PHC, [Final Report 2](#).

The participants collaborated with three different kinds of scholars: project advisors, local scholars, and outside consultants. The project advisors visited the site three times over the duration of the project at the beginning, middle, and end of each phase, which was approximately once each year. These advisors could also be contacted as many times as necessary via telephone or email in order to work with the museum staff to refine their ideas for new programming and to help them locate the resources necessary to establish new exhibits and create new interpretations.⁶⁴ Local scholars were the people who actually helped the sites turn their ideas into reality; they were responsible for conducting research and writing the new interpretations, but they were limited to twenty days during which they could assist the site staff with their research projects. However, twenty days was not sufficient time for some of the sites to complete their research, so the PHC created a separate fund with which the sites could buy more research time. Sites could either pay their local scholar to assist them for additional days or they could hire an outside consultant or an additional scholar.⁶⁵ Through these three scholarly resources, participants were able to develop new programming that encompassed the history of the entire community, including slaves, lower class laborers, and women.

Besides encouraging collaboration between the site staff and its scholars, *Raising Our Sites* created a forum through which the participants could contact each other for ideas and solutions to problems. One way in which the participants could share their ideas and progress was through the yearly conference. Each February during the course of the project, the museum professionals and scholars would gather for a statewide meeting in which they heard lectures on planning new exhibits, interpreting controversial material, and evaluating visitor responses to their new

⁶⁴ The PHC, Final Report 4.

⁶⁵ The PHC, Final Report 4.

programming.⁶⁶ The PHC also set up an email “list-serv” through which the participants could communicate with one another quickly and in mass format that saved a tremendous amount of time. Project advisors, local scholars, speakers, and a variety of other people involved with *Raising Our Sites* were included on List-serv; they used it for a number of things, including discussing administrative details, posting information on conferences and grant opportunities, and advertising programming events.⁶⁷ These two tools were imperative to the success of the project and are still used by the participants to exchange information today.

An integral part of the *Raising Our Sites*’ programming was the creation of an evaluative procedure for each site to assess the success their new programs. Worksheets were formatted such that data could be collected from them easily despite the site staff’s heavy workload and lack of time. The professionals were taught how to analyze these evaluations, making them able to assess the need for new programming in the future. This final step truly made the project a success because its participants are now self-sufficient in terms of being able to assess the need for change and the success of their new interpretations in the future.

Interpretation at Pennsbury Manor has undergone an intense period of change as a result of *Raising Our Sites*, which makes it an excellent example of the integration of women and African-Americans into public education venues. Prior to participating in *Raising Our Sites*, Pennsbury failed to address the women who kept Penn’s household running smoothly so that he could conduct his affairs as governor of the colony. His wife, Hannah, was only mentioned as being the mother of his son, John, who was his only child born in the colonies; no attention was paid to her skills at managing a large household, her head for business in keeping the family’s finances in order, nor to

⁶⁶ The PHC, Final Report 2.

⁶⁷ The PHC, Final Report 5.

her ability of creating herbal medicines from the plants in the garden.⁶⁸ It was not until the *Raising Our Sites* project that these facts were discovered and included as an important part of Pennsbury's history.

Interpretation of African-Americans has also been a sensitive subject for Pennsbury in the past, and, despite the accomplishments of *Raising Our Sites*, continues to pose an interpretive dilemma. William Penn is one of the most well known Quakers, yet his ownership of slaves is contrary to every Quaker principle. At the time, the Society of Friends did not prohibit the ownership of slaves, but modern audience members see slavery as tarnish on Penn's moral character. However, this controversy is not confined to Pennsbury; Frisch notes that:

Such considerations blend into [another] concern – the dilemma of the implied story itself, the tension that frequently may exist between the audience's interest in having a particular version of the story told, with all the opportunities that this opens for powerful interpretation, and the responsibility presenters have to offer the truest, most correctly framed history they can.⁶⁹

Before *Raising Our Sites*, slavery was simply not discussed at Pennsbury because of the lack of information on his slaves as well as the fact that the staff simply did not know how to approach the topic such that it would not create a completely negative image of Penn.⁷⁰ With the help of the PHC, Pennsbury was able to uncover information on five of Penn's slaves as well as Penn's first will which granted them their freedom upon his death. While this piece of information made it easier for tour guides to address the issue of Penn's moral consciousness, it did not change the fact that Penn's reputation as an exemplary person was slightly degraded by the inclusion of slaves as part of Pennsbury's past. Though interpreting slavery at Pennsbury has created a more accurate

⁶⁸ Kunz.

⁶⁹ Frisch 219.

⁷⁰ Kunz.

interpretation of its past, Pennsbury's ties to slavery have placed the site in the difficult position of being a forum for the debate over slavery.

Unlike Pennsbury, Elfreth's Alley was not a part of the PHC's *Raising Our Sites* program, and as a result, has been unable to expand its interpretation to include women and African-Americans. Inhabitants of the Alley consisted mainly of working class families and their tenants, who usually resided on the Alley for short periods of time while working in the area. Tenant records, if they even exist, merely state the renter's name, the duration of his stay, and, in some cases, the renter's occupation. These records, however, are by no means consistent or trustworthy sources of information on the tenants of the Alley. Without financial assistance, the museum has been unable to conduct more thorough research on its tenant population, which may have included free blacks and runaway slaves. Yet this intriguing aspect of the Alley's past is forced to remain obscure because the resources are simply not available to conduct the research that is necessary to broaden the interpretation.

Although interpretation is constantly changing to include new types of histories or new groups of people, it is by no means limited to the content and subject matter of museums and historic sites. The exhibits and tours through which museums communicate with their audience are also influenced by changes in their interpretive policies. However, the recent focus on interpretive content, while improving what a museum has to say, has neglected to address the Educational Programming through which institutions communicate their material to different types of audiences.

Section 4

Educational Programming

While broadening the scope of interpretation is an effective method by which museums and historic sites can reach out to the public, education can only take place if the museum is able to communicate with people of different ages, interests, and educational levels. Consider the group of ten year-olds at Elfreth's Alley: they are in Philadelphia because they are on a school trip, not because they have a great interest in the city where our nation was first conceived. The children may notice that the houses are small, and wonder what it would be like to have to share a bed with their brothers and sisters, cook over a fire, and go to bed by dark because there was no electricity to watch television. The adult chaperones, on the other hand, may think of how difficult it would be to climb the winding staircase in a full skirt and thank god for their electric blender and washing machine that have revolutionized housework. The children and the chaperones are at different points in their lives and therefore have two completely different perspectives of the time period represented by Elfreth's Alley. It is the museum's responsibility to address the needs of both groups in order to serve as an effective venue for public education.

Museums and historic sites have an aura about them that, despite changes in interpretive methods and content, still promote public history as dry and boring. In truth, museums are boring for children who get dragged there by their parents while on vacation or by teachers claiming that the visit will improve and enhance their education, especially since until recently, museum tours and exhibits were not designed with children in mind. With the rise of hands-on museums created specifically for children in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a new concept of Educational Programming was born in the museum field. Frisch notes that:

The politics of public history criticism, that is, often come down to debates about who is framing and executing the program, for what purposes, and for what audiences. These debates, in turn, are often worked out in terms of the appropriate qualifications of designers, the ‘mix’ of participants, the ‘role’ of humanists and community members, and the formats chosen for reaching specified audiences in intended ways.⁷¹

Frisch is voicing, although in a more sophisticated and complex manner, the complaints of every schoolchild who has had to suffer through museum school trips. However, museum programs are beginning to experiment with alternative methods that would communicate their history to children in a manner that was educational and enjoyable. These new methods that museums are employing are part of a larger interpretive expression known as Educational Programming.

Educational Programming is a necessity in one form or another in museums and historic sites because of the diverse population that makes up the audience. According to Frisch, a museum is:

Expected to address: a regular procession of schoolchildren presumed to need a simplified, graspable storyline; visiting tourists, dignitaries, and businessmen for whom it seems appropriate to put a best municipal foot forward; and a diverse general population,...[and] gather [them] under a unifying, historical umbrella.⁷²

⁷¹ Frisch 184.

⁷² Frisch 241.

Frisch is highlighting the most difficult aspect of museum interpretation: creating an exhibit such that it can be understood and enjoyed by each member of the audience. This is an extremely difficult task because museum audiences have a wide range of learning abilities and personal interests. These high expectations for museum displays mean that museums have to avoid catering to one particular group or another; the general exhibits and tours have to either be adaptable to different groups of visitors or there have to be separate exhibits and tours more suitable to the educational level of the other members of the audience.

Educational Programming became a more popular idea as a result of the other changes taking place in museums in terms of interpretive methods and content. As museums began to listen to criticism from their audiences, they re-evaluated the effectiveness of their interpretive methods, which led to the shift from the Formalist Approach to the more dynamic and engaging Analytical Perspective. After these changes began taking place, other criticisms emerged which caused an avalanche of new ideas and concepts to bombard the museum community. Educational Programming was part of this new current because museum audiences are diverse not only in terms of race and ethnicity, but in age and learning capabilities as well. Because museums and historic sites exist to educate the public, they should therefore have programs that address the varying educational and intellectual abilities of their audiences.

There are several ways in which tours and exhibits can be designed to serve different members of the audience. Verbal and physical modification of tours and exhibits are the easiest, and perhaps the most common, ways to adapt museum visits to people of different educational levels. Using this method, the tour guide has several tours from which he can choose one that is appropriate for each audience. Wyck Home utilizes this method of Educational Programming

because it does not cost extra money to implement and can easily be done by every tour guide. A group of ten year-olds at Wyck is given a tour that focuses on the lives of the family members that is illustrated by the furniture, books, and other objects in the house. The main purpose of this tour is to give the children a brief history of the family, just enough so that they learn about the Quaker family and its values, but not so much that the amount of information becomes overwhelming and the children cease paying attention. In this situation, the tour guide must use his own judgment of which material is appropriate for the age of the children and how much of that information they are able absorb.⁷³

This method of Educational Programming has obvious drawbacks because it relies heavily on the intuition of the tour guide. Not all ten year-olds have the background to understand the same material, and what may be appropriate for one group may not suit another. As a result, modifying tours based upon tour guides' instincts are an inexpensive form of Educational Programming, but not always the most effective one.

Another method of Educational Programming, also used by Wyck, is a specialized tour that is arranged by the group prior to its visit. In specialized tours, the museum has several set topics that can be discussed in the context of a tour of the historic house. Wyck, for example, has a popular tour on eighteenth century gardens and horticulture because the family became very involved in the local horticulture society in the mid-nineteenth century. Groups who take this tour are educated about the family and its involvement in the community with gardening and horticulture. Wyck also receives many requests for tours that focus on the architecture of the house, and these tours cite the many renovations that the home underwent over the years and how changes to the building mirrored changes within the family and the community at large.⁷⁴ These specialized

⁷³ Jeff Groff, "Wyck Guide's Manual," Wyck Home, Germantown, Pennsylvania, February 2001.

⁷⁴ Groff, interview.

tours allow the museum to educate its audience through topics in which the visitors are interested, which creates a more meaningful educational experience.

Although verbal modification of tours is cost efficient and easy to implement, Educational Programming can be an entirely separate set of tours and exhibits at museums and historic sites. Pennsbury Manor has different programs for children of different ages as well as props with which they can modify tours for families so that both children and adults have a meaningful experience. This wide array of programs is unusual in small house museums, but Pennsbury has solid financial backing from the Pennsbury Society and excellent staff support from their twenty full-time employees.⁷⁵

The school group programming at Pennsbury is a mixture of hands-on activities, videos, and tours of the manor and grounds. School groups are encouraged to call to arrange their visit prior to their arrival, which allows the coordinator of the trip to speak with the museum staff in order to decide on an appropriate program for the group. Only one school group is allowed at the manor at a time, which prevents lost children and general havoc. Pennsbury also prefers that school groups visit on days when the museum is not open to the general public; this prevents the children from disturbing other visitors' experiences and vice versa.⁷⁶

Once the details have been agreed upon, the museum staff works with the trip coordinator to select a program that is appropriate for the group. By working with the coordinator, the museum eliminates the hassle and unpredictability of having tour guides choose the tour for the group at the time of their arrival. A tour consists of several elements, which the museum staff and the coordinator select together to create the perfect visit. There are several videos on William Penn and the early days of Philadelphia, which give elementary school children a basic background in

⁷⁵ Pennsbury Manor, Volunteer Manual 3.

⁷⁶ Kunz.

Philadelphia history on which the remainder of the tour can be built. Younger groups are encouraged to feed the animals in order to learn about farming and agriculture in the early eighteenth century, and the covered barge teaches about transportation during the period. Another interesting option for the tour is a stop at the home of one of Penn's workers. The one-room cottage has been recreated with replications of eighteenth century clothing, furniture, toys, and tools so that children can use the objects and physically learn about how people lived at the time. This building is perhaps one of Pennsbury's best Educational Programs because both adults and children become physically engaged with the material, which is a big change from the ropes and "Do not touch" signs that ornament the manor house.⁷⁷

Family tours are perhaps the most difficult in terms of Educational Programming because the tour guide is forced to address adults and children at the same time without placing a greater emphasis on either's experience. Families are given the same tour of the manor house and property as adult groups, and the tour guide verbally modifies the tour so that the children can understand and relate to the material. However, in the manor house there are several miniature replications of objects displayed in the house that the children are permitted to play with while their parents are exploring the different rooms. One such replication is a miniature canopy bed that resembles the one in which Penn's children would have slept along with a doll and several miniaturized items from this same room. Children are encouraged to play with the bed and the doll, and to look at differences between the doll's clothing and bed and their own, as well as try to figure out the use of each of the miniature items. There is a chamber pot, footwarmer, and several other items from which the children can learn about eighteenth century life.⁷⁸ By giving the children a separate

⁷⁷ Kunz.

⁷⁸ Kunz.

activity, Pennsbury allows the adults to have an intellectually stimulating tour while their children learn on their own level.

These educational programs at Pennsbury are uncommon in small house museums because they require additional funding and planning for which there are usually limited resources. Pennsbury is a large Historic House Museum, and its ties to the William Penn Foundation and the support of the Pennsbury Society give them the funding necessary to have a broad range of Educational Programs. This kind of programming and the extent to which it is adaptable to children is unparalleled by the other museums in this study.

Educational Programming is difficult to implement because it seems that there are other areas to which funding should be devoted first. However, some museum associations are trying to encourage their members to use funding to create separate Educational Programs by stressing the educational aspect of their mission. The AAM has a *Code of Ethics for Museums* that establishes the museums' duty to the public to create programs that meet their educational needs. The AAM has had such a code since the early 1920s. The most recent version, written in 1992, is much more extensive than any of the previous versions. Basically, the *Code of Ethics* claims that museums have a duty to the public: they must protect their resources because they essentially belong to the public and these resources must be used for the benefit of that public. The *Code of Ethics* also demands that institutions meet these needs without any selfish gain on the part of the staff or the institution itself.⁷⁹

Although these principles may seem very basic, in fact, they are quite important to interpretation. The AAM requires that all of its members adopt their own *Code of Ethics* that more specifically addresses the needs and concerns of their particular institution. By doing so, the AAM

⁷⁹ The American Association of Museums, [Code of Ethics for Museums Page](http://www.aam-us.org/aamcode.htm), 1 February 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/aamcode.htm>>.

is basically forcing its members to be servants of the public, which means that they must expand and change their interpretations to meet the needs and demands of the public. For example, Harriton House is located in the suburbs of Philadelphia, and its most frequent visitors are elementary school groups studying the evolution of Philadelphia from farmland to city. As a result, Harriton has a special version of their tour in which the guide discusses the transformation of the farm estate into a suburban neighborhood.⁸⁰ This program is an example of a way in which the AAM's hopes its *Code of Ethics* will force institutions to adapt their museums to the needs of their public.

The AASLH is currently sponsoring several programs whose scopes include helping its participants create Educational Programming. The *Historic House Program* and the *American Indian Museums Program* are designed to aid small historic sites that usually struggle financially, making it next to impossible to hire scholars or devote time to changing interpretation and creating new programming. The *Diversity In and For History* program was established to increase the number of minority professionals in the museum field through scholarships, mentorships, and partnerships. By diversifying the professionals working in museums, the AASLH is hoping to diversify programming as well. The AASLH is also running a program that will help member institutions create an evaluation for themselves that they can use to identify and correct programming problems.⁸¹ These programs, although not directly aimed at Educational Programming, are designed to help improve interpretation and programming in the different types of institutions that are members of the AASLH.

⁸⁰ Gill.

⁸¹ The American Association for State and Local History, [AASLH Operating Plan Summary Page](http://www.aaslh.org/operatingpla.htm), 11 February 2002 <<http://www.aaslh.org/operatingpla.htm>>.

Despite the fact that the AASLH does not have a National Interpretation Project like the AAM and is not developing set standards for interpretation like the National Trust, they are still attempting to deal with interpretive issues. Rather than using programs that require large sums of money and long periods of time, the AASLH chooses instead to run workshops that deal with specific interpretive issues as they arise. The *Interpretive Issues and Strategies* workshop is aimed at new and mid-career museums professionals as well as volunteers that are actively involved in the administrative process of their institution. The goal of the workshop is to teach the participants methods and strategies of interpretation, including how to approach planning, research, content, programming, audiences, techniques, and evaluation.⁸² Although this workshop will not change interpretation on a national scale, it will help those who participate to better understand current ideas and methodologies that they can utilize in their own institutions.

On a more focused level, the AASLH is conducting a workshop for its smaller members: the Historic House Museums. The *Historic House Museum Issues and Operations* is a workshop for directors, professionals, and volunteers who work in or with historic houses. Although the workshop intends to cover a variety of topics pertinent to the administration of a house museum, interpretation and programming are some of the major topics being addressed. Specifically, the workshop will help its participants “become familiar with the types of research that are appropriate for historic house museums and learn how to translate that research into interpretive themes.”⁸³ By having a workshop specifically for smaller museums, the AASLH is able to address the specific interpretive and programming issues that these museums face.

⁸² The American Association for State and Local History, [Interpretation Issues and Strategies Page](http://www.aaslh.org/InterpretationWorkshop.htm), 11 February 2002 <<http://www.aaslh.org/InterpretationWorkshop.htm>>.

⁸³ The American Association for State and Local History, [Historic House Museum Issues and Operations Page](http://www.aaslh.org/HistoricHouseWorkshop.htm), 11 February 2002 <<http://www.aaslh.org/HistoricHouseWorkshop.htm>>.

Educational Programming is an aspect of interpretation that Elfreth's Alley is attempting to expand upon. The museum is visited by as many as one hundred schoolchildren in a single day, which means that children are coming through the museum at a fairly rapid rate. These groups receive a general history of the Alley and of the occupants of the two museum houses at the beginning of the tour, and then they are allowed to roam the two houses with their chaperones. Depending on the guide, sometimes children are asked to guess what certain objects were used for, which helps to capture the attention of younger groups. School groups that arrange their visit in advance are given a more thorough tour, and the museum staff works with the trip coordinator to establish the content that would be most appropriate for the children. These groups are also sent a School Group Packet by mail, which contains information about the Alley as well as a scavenger hunt list. The list contains items that can be found in the museum houses and on the Alley, and is an effective way to get the children to explore and examine the museum and the Alley itself.

Unlike Pennsbury Manor, there are no extensive programs or special exhibits specifically designed for school groups. The main reason for this is that most of these groups visit Philadelphia for the famous Independence Hall and Liberty Bell, and use the rest of the day to stop at the Mint, Franklin Square, and the Betsy Ross House, just to name a few. Because of the brief amount of time that these groups spend at each site, it is difficult to create effective programming for their short and often unannounced visits. Pennsbury's isolated location, on the other hand, has the advantage of giving them a captive audience once they get people to their site. Elfreth's Alley has found it difficult in the past to draw large groups of children for extensive periods of time, which makes separate Educational Programming seem an unnecessary waste of time and money.

Elfreth's Alley has, however, been working to improve their communication with families. The Alley has an unusually good relationship with families because the size of the museum allows

for a maximum number of ten people on a tour. This small size means that tours are on the short side, lasting only about twenty minutes, and they run continuously throughout the day. Therefore, tours typically consist of only one or two families, which allow the tour guide to give more personal attention to the needs of both the adults and the children. The museum has also been incorporated into the programming of Historic Philadelphia, Inc., which is a group that sends colonial characters into the streets, museums, and gardens of Philadelphia to entertain the tourists. A play entitled “1787” is performed three times a day in the back garden, and it is a lively and funny play about Philadelphia in the year 1787. Families enjoy this programming because it addresses their children on a level that they can understand, but is informative, educational, and entertaining for the adults as well.

Educational Programming is a limited field of interpretation for many museums and historic sites because of budget limitations. At Pennsbury, separate programs are useful because the people who make the trip are there specifically to visit the manor, and are therefore willing to spend an hour on a tour. An hour is plenty of time to run special programs, and makes investing money in these exhibits worthwhile because they are actually utilized by their audience. At Elfreth’s Alley, however, many of their school groups are restrained by time commitments to the larger museums and historic sites. This means that special exhibits and tours must be brief, and creating educational programming seems to be a waste of time and money that can be better spent to improve other aspects of the museum’s interpretation. It is this argument that has put Educational Programming on the back burner for many institutions, and indeed, neither historians nor museum associations regularly address the topic.

Conclusion

As the thirty ten year-olds turn off of Elfreth's Alley towards the Betsy Ross House, the guide smiles and shakes her head, wondering if the children will remember anything she said by the time their whirlwind trip to Philadelphia comes to a conclusion. Philadelphia is a wonderful city full of historic places, and no trip would be complete without visiting as many of them as possible. However, as a guide, one cannot help but hope that they will remember Elfreth's Alley because it is so small that it is often overshadowed by the historical importance and sheer magnitude of places like Independence Hall. But Elfreth's Alley is important in its own way because only there can visitors learn about the residents, past and present, of our nation's oldest residential street.

Interpretation played a major role in this school group's visit to Elfreth's Alley, though it is unlikely that any of the children even thought about the underlying factors behind the exhibits they saw and the tour they received. In fact, everything in museums and historic sites is designed with a reason in mind, and these reasons are often connected to interpretation and how it can be used to communicate with the audience. Interpretive policies and theories are used to design the exhibits, formulate the tour, and create the Educational Programming through which the ten year-olds were taught about the history of Elfreth's Alley. However, few people ever realize that there is a method

behind the presentation in museums, and as a result, they do not realize that they have a right to question these methods.

The public-education role of museums and historic sites is somewhat controversial in nature because their commitment to the public is often overshadowed by commitments to patrons and funding limitations. Museums have two main functions: the preservation of the past and the duty to educate the public about this past; therefore, they are technically servants of the public. However, museums are rarely willing to receive input from the public about what is presented in their museums and the way in which it is presented. Some institutions have surveys or comment forms much like those provided in restaurants, which ask for the visitor's opinion of the tour or of a specific program. There are not, however, questions that ask the visitor for actual input on the content of the museum exhibits; the surveys are usually used to rate the success, or failure, of a new exhibit or program design. As a result, visitors have little say in the interpretative techniques used in museums and historic sites.

Audiences have a right and a responsibility to be involved with places of public history in order to ensure that they are performing their duty to the public. Although they have an air of importance about them, museums are not untouchable; their roped-off rooms and quiet atmosphere have created a sense of fear and awe in the public, so much so that audiences often resist the temptation to criticize them. If one were to have a bad meal in a restaurant, he would surely not hesitate to complain to his waitress, the manager, or someone else who could help fix the problem and improve the food so that he would never have a bad experience in that restaurant again. At museums, however, visitors who are bored by a tour usually assume it is simply a characteristic of museums to be quiet and sometimes boring, and rarely, if ever, file a complaint with the staff. As a result, museums stay the same because their visitors do not inform them that they are not effectively

communicating with their audience, which means that they are not fulfilling their duty of educating the public.

The process of looking critically at museums and their interpretive methods did not begin until a generation of new faces appeared in the museum community. These new museum professionals, with the help of public consulting groups and the support of museum associations, were able to implement changes in the content and presentation of the past in museums. What began as a deviation from white, elite history turned into a study of objects and their representation of the past, known as the Formalist Approach. Today, this idea has evolved into the Analytical Perspective, which uses objects to illustrate the past by examining their relationship with the people that used them and the greater society. Although the exact origins of this transformation are unknown, it could not have been successfully implemented in museums without the aid of outside research by scholars working with various consulting groups. Programs sponsored by museum associations that provided museums and historic sites with the necessary resources to create new interpretive programs further aided the process. But in the end, audiences approved this new interpretation; without their approval, the Analytical Perspective would not have been utilized because museums exist to serve the public, so programs lacking their support would eventually be discontinued.

After the rise of the Analytical Perspective, museum content came under revision because it failed to represent all aspects of the past. The movement to include ordinary people and everyday life in museums arose because it was theorized that audiences would be able to relate to common people and would therefore learn more from the museums. By creating exhibits in which audiences could view the lives of ordinary people much like themselves, museums' ordinary activities made a

new medium through which the audience could compare their lives to the past. As a result, museums created a more effective line of communication with their audience.

Once museums began changing their content to include ordinary people, there was a push to include all people in displays of public history. Women, African-Americans, and the ordinary private in the military were usually omitted from museums and historic sites because either there was little information available or their past was not felt to be important enough to warrant exhibition. However, as everyday life became the focus of many museums, it seemed only right to tell the whole story, which included the lives of mothers, daughters, slaves, and servants. Although presenting these histories has created some difficulties in preserving the ideal picture of the past in the minds of the audience, they are an important part of the examination of racism, sexism, and the values and biases of society in the past.

While museum associations conduct programs and projects that seek to improve interpretive practices, they have limitations that prevent their organizations from effecting institutions on a large scale. The AAM, the National Trust, and the AASLH have members of all sizes from across the country, and in some cases, even international constituents. However, membership can be expensive for those institutions that have small endowments, making them unable to belong to every association. This limits the effectiveness of the associations because their materials are often not accessible to those outside of the organization. Museum associations are constantly publishing scholarly articles on issues facing the field, yet these are only available to members or those people who chose to pay for a subscription to their magazine. Once again, funding limitations cause many small institutions to miss the opportunity to benefit from the research conducted by and for museum associations. As a result, large associations could be more effective at implementing interpretive changes if their method of “sharing” information was improved.

Museum audiences do not realize that museums exist to serve them, which therefore gives them the right to demand programming that meets their educational needs. Some institutions have created specific programs and exhibits for different audiences, while others rely on their tour guides to modify the verbal presentation of the museum. Educational Programming, however, has not been implemented to the same extent as the Analytical Perspective and the inclusion of women and African-Americans. This is the audience's fault; if they wish to see exhibits and tours that are designed for specific educational needs, they need to demand it. And as servants of the public, museums have the responsibility of meeting these demands by creating programs that better suit their different audiences. However, audiences usually fail to realize that they do have a say in the interpretive content and presentation in museums, and so museums go unchanged and the public goes ill educated.

Interpretation is the backbone for the content and exhibition of the past in museums and historic sites. It is constantly changing, so museum professionals require the help of outside consulting groups and museum associations in order to modify their policies and improve their institutions. However, museums exist to serve the public, so their interpretative policies must continue to change in order to meet the changing educational needs of their audience.

Nothing is forever; interpretation will always need modification in order to ensure that museums and historic sites represent the truest form of the past. William Leuchtenburg framed the importance of interpretation best when he said, "The activist historian who thinks he is deriving his policy from his history may in fact be deriving his history from his policy, and may be driven to commit the cardinal sin of the historical writer: he may lose his respect for the integrity, the

independence, the pastness, of the past.”⁸⁴ Without effective and updated interpretive theories and practices, museums and historic sites will be sacrificing the truest representation of their history.

⁸⁴ William E. Leuchtenburg, “The Historian and the Public Realm,” The American Historical Review 97.1 (Feb. 1992): 8.

Bibliographic Essay

I would like to preface my bibliography with an explanation of its contents and a description of my research methodology. A large proportion of my research was internet-based, and as this type of research is often frowned upon among scholars, I believe it warrants an explanation for those who question the validity of my research.

The reader will notice that some of my research was conducted using the internet, which is unusual, but very pertinent to my study. One form of the internet that I found useful was e-mail. Although I visited the four museums in my case study and spoke with their curators in person, as I began the actual writing of this document, I found that I needed further information on the sites. E-mail was extremely useful in this case because it allowed the curators to respond at their leisure, which gave them time to think about the questions that I posed. Also, it eliminated the need for finding a convenient time for both parties to be available to converse on the telephone or in person. I also found e-mail to be helpful in contacting people associated with museum associations. Although I originally attempted to contact them by telephone, I found it frustrating trying to reach them because I seemed to call every time they were out of the office. E-mail, then, was a way to pose my questions to them about their associations, and like the curators, they could respond at their convenience. Without e-mail, I think I would have had significantly less information for this document simply because of difficulties in connecting with several sources by telephone.

Although e-mail was a very useful research tool, another internet source that I used to research museum associations was websites. Searches of periodicals and literary sources returned no information on the museum associations that were discussed throughout this document. I turned to the internet as a last resort; every association had its own site that not only gave background

information on the organization, but included descriptions of their current projects and programs. Although I initially contacted the associations by telephone and email, I was consistently referred to their websites for the information that I was seeking.

While these are somewhat non-traditional sources, I found them to be imperative to my research process and I feel that they are useful tools for the museums in my study. E-mail is an easy way to contact a large number of people, which makes advertising special events or asking for last minute volunteers a much simpler process compared to phone calls or faxes. This is helpful for smaller museums and historic sites because it makes it easier to communicate with other institutions in a time- and cost-efficient manner. Websites are also useful to these same sites because they allow large museum associations to communicate with all of their members. By posting conference information and the latest programming, these organizations are making themselves accessible to all institutions that wish to utilize their programming.

It is for these reasons that internet sources were extremely pertinent to my research, despite the fact that they are not traditional sources for historical studies. And so I ask the reader to consider my work in high esteem in spite of its unusual bibliography.

Bibliography

The American Association for State and Local History. AASLH Awards Program Page. 11 February 2002 <<http://www.aaslh.org/Awards2001.htm>>.

The American Association for State and Local History. AASLH Operating Plan Summary Page. 11 February 2002 <<http://www.aaslh.org/operatingpla.htm>>.

The American Association for State and Local History. Historic House Museum Issues and Operations Page. 11 February 2002 <<http://www.aaslh.org/HistoricHouseWorkshop.htm>>.

The American Association for State and Local History. Interpretation Issues and Strategies Page. 11 February 2002 <<http://www.aaslh.org/InterpretationWorkshop.htm>>.

The American Association for State and Local History. Overview Page. 10 April 2002 <<http://www.aaslh.org/whoweare.htm>>.

The American Association of Museums. About AAM Page. 24 January 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/about.htm>>.

The American Association of Museums. Accreditation Page. 2 February 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/accredproginfo.htm>>.

The American Association of Museums. Bookstore Page. 10 April 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/bookstore.htm>>.

The American Association of Museums. Characteristics of Exemplary Interpretation: A Working Document Page. 2 February 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/NIPchex.htm>>.

The American Association of Museums. Code of Ethics for Museums Page. 1 February 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/aamcode.htm>>.

The American Association of Museums. Frequently Asked Questions Page. 10 April 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/aamfaqs.htm>>.

The American Association of Museums. National Interpretation Project: Overview Page. 2 February 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/NIPoverview.htm>>.

The American Association of Museums. National Interpretation Project: Status Report Page. 2 February 2002 <<http://www.aam-us.org/NIPapril.htm>>.

Blatti, Jo. Introduction. Past Meets Present. Ed. by Blatti. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987. 1-20.

Boyer, Paul. "Whose History is it Anyway?" History Wars. Ed. Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt. New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996. 115-139.

Clausse, W. Edmunds. Wyck: The Story of an Historic House 1690-1970. Philadelphia: Mary T. Haines, 1970.

Cohen, David William. "Further Thoughts on the Production of History." Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations. Ed. Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith. Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1997. 300-310.

Crew, Spencer R., and James Oliver Horton. "Afro-Americans and Museums: Towards a Policy of Inclusion." History Museums in the United States. Ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989. 215-236.

Ettema, Michael J. "History Museums and the Culture of Materialism." Past Meets Present. Ed. Jo Blatti. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987. 62-85.

Frisch, Michael. A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990.

Gill, Bruce. Personal interview. 8 February 2002.

Groff, Jeff. Personal interview. 17 October 2001.

Groff, Jeff. "Re: Another Question for you." E-mail to the author. 11 February 2002.

Groff, Jeff. "Re: Tri-State Coalition of Historic Places." E-mail to the author. 15 February 2002.

Groff, Jeff. Wyck Guide's Manual. Unpublished manual, 2001.

Kunz, Mary Ellyn. Personal interview. 2 November 2001.

Leuchtenburg, William E. "The Historian and the Public Realm." The American Historical Review 97.1 (Feb. 1992).

Lloyd, Sandy. "Re: Questions." E-mail to the author. 31 January 2002.

Melosh, Barbara. "Speaking of Women." History Museums in the United States. Ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989. 183-214.

Nash, Gary. First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

The National Endowment for the Humanities. Overview Page. 11 April 2002
<<http://www.neh.gov/whoweare/overview.html>>.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation. History of the National Trust Page. 7 February 2002
<http://www.nthp.org/about_the_trust/history.html>.

Pennsbury Manor. Volunteer Manual. Unpublished manual, 2001.

The Pennsylvania Humanities Council. About Us Page. 1 February 2002
<<http://www.pahumanities.org/about.php>>.

The Pennsylvania Humanities Council. Raising Our Sites: Final Report for The William Penn Foundation. Unpublished Report, 2 February 2001.

Rosenzweig, Roy, and David Thelen, ed. The Presence of the Past. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Schlereth, Thomas J. "Museums and Material Culture." History Museums in the United States. Ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989. 294-320.

Van Balgooy, Max. "Interpretation at National Trust Historic Sites." E-mail to the author. 25 January 2002.