

Living history: reconstructing the past for the edification of the present

By Lindsey J. Cranton

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Abstract

Museum education is an amazingly broad and diverse field. Museums everywhere have their own ideas and procedures that shape the way in which they educate their visitors. Living history has become an increasingly popular way in the United States and abroad in which to educate the general public about historic events that have occurred in our communal pasts. Living history museums are a unique and proportionally small number of museums which postulate that learning can be an immersive and enjoyable experience. Living history museums are life size dioramas that visitors can interact with and that require active participation of all of our human senses.

Education at living history museums is designed to be fun and engaging, and is constantly trying to instill in visitors of all ages, a sense of wonder and excitement for both their natural and built environments. This type of 'edutainment' is a more viable option to the dry and outdated modes of education that are found in traditional history museums. People learn best from experiences that they enjoy. This new integration of education with entertainment and multiple forms of communication have made living history museums livelier and more engaging places. This paper will examine the educational experience provided for young visitors to America's living history museums. Two of America's most notable and popular living history museums will be examined; Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia and the partnership of Historic Jamestowne and the Jamestowne Settlement, Virginia. This capstone will address the question: are living history museums effective tools and institutions for the studying, learning, and understanding of specific time periods in the past?

The conclusions in this work are that while historical interpretation at living history museums is not always historically accurate, it is still an effective and engaging set of tools and methods that can be utilized to teach visitors about a diverse range of subjects; anthropology, archaeology, academic history, landscape architecture, social history, historical geography, material cultural studies and interpretation, landscape archaeology, and regional folklife. The first American living history institutions, such as Colonial Williamsburg, helped to create a broad way in which to educate their visitors about the past and the values that were perceived important at the time. More modernized institutions, such as the conjoined Historic Jamestowne and the Jamestowne Settlement have furthered the living history industry's ability to create meaningful and wondrous programming without straying too far from academically defined 'truths'.

Keywords and definitions

Edutainment - education in the guise of entertainment

Historical Interpretation - the explanation of historical events, sites, and/or subjects

Culture Heritage Management - the vocation and practice of managing cultural heritage

Educational Programming - the programs used to facilitate learning and exploration at living history institutions

“Historical Culture” - denotes diverse past-relationships, articulated in a broad array of narratives, media, concepts, ideologies, and attitudes

Macroartifact - an object in a historic site’s collection that does not necessarily have intrinsic value but may be utilitarian in nature without special esthetic merit. These artifacts are historically significant in their arrangement and relationships to one another (Schell 1985).

Main research question

Are living history museums effective tools and institutions for the studying, learning, and understanding of specific time periods in the past?

This question developed out of extensive research into the many different types of living history museums and programs that are offered around the world. I also drew upon my own personal experiences with living history museums in order to better understand the power of place and its effectiveness as an educational tool.

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Lindsey Cranton

Telephone
562-243-5920

Email
LINDSEYCRANTON@GMAIL.COM

[HTTP://AAABLOGS.UOREGON.EDU/CRANTON/ABOUT-2/](http://aaablogs.uoregon.edu/cranton/about-2/)

Profile

I am a highly effective and dedicated worker who has had a great deal of experience working in customer relations across a wide range of fields. I work efficiently and with great care in order to complete all tasks assigned to me within a timely fashion. I am fully capable of working with various types of database softwares and handling money. I am looking forward to working in a unique and wonderful museum environment.

Experience

Marketing Coordinator, Internship, The RMS Queen Mary, Long Beach, CA, June-September 2010

My duties included creating content and layout for the new Queen Mary website, www.QueenMary.com, along with assisting the marketing manager in strategic planning and daily responsibilities.

Co-Exhibit Designer, Tie Dye and Tofu, Lane County Historical Museum, Eugene, OR, February- May 2010

My team researched and restored a 1963 Volkswagen Transporter in order to install it as a part of an interactive exhibit that will be standing until the 30th of September 2011.

Librarian's Assistant, Sonoma State University Library Rohnert Park, CA, February 2007- December 2008

Working in Interlibrary Loans and at the Circulation desk my duties included, but were not limited to repairing damaged books, packaging and shipping books, helping patrons find appropriate research materials, checking books in and out of the library, re-shelving and organizing the library and taking fines from patrons.

Field Assistant for Dr. Susan Redford, Penn State University Luxor, Egypt, Summer 2008

My duties were to catalog and detail all artifacts that were exhumed from our dig site in the Valley of the Nobles. I gained hands on experience of the proper methods to document and store many interesting and priceless artifacts, including but not limited to, shabtis, mummified human remains, linens, papyrus, offering tables and other stone sculptures.

Education

University of Oregon, Eugene, OR — MS Art Administration, Museum Studies, June 2011

University of Oregon, Eugene, OR — Museum Studies Certificate, June 2011

Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA — BA History, 2008

Skills

I am a dedicated and hard working person who is always punctual and pleasant to work with. I am fully capable of using MAC and PC softwares, along with all of the ADOBE suite of softwares. I am extremely confident in my abilities to use WordPress and Excel.

Referrals

Please feel free to contact me if you would like a list of references and referrals. Thank you.

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Introduction

Living history is a marvelous, expressive form of culture that functions in a variety of capacities. It is promoted to be used as a research and interpretive tool that fosters a better understanding of our historical counterparts who occupied other times and places. This method of education also serves as a medium in which participants can act out in a socially acceptable way and interact with behaviors that are not commonly encountered in our contemporary world (Anderson, 2002). Living history museums are quite popular among current visitors because they give us a chance to marvel at the world around us (Bettelheim, 1984). These institutions provide visitors an opportunity to experience the workings of past everyday life, and to understand them in a context that is both relevant and engaging to young audiences. Wonder is a requisite part of any successful museum education program. According to Duensing's article *Artifacts and Artifacts*, museum education programs need to instill a sense of 'wonder' in all of their participants in order for the program to be effective in the long term (1999).

Living history museums are life size dioramas that invite participants in to interact and employ all of their senses in the learning process (Anderson, 1982). Living history is what many museum professionals and proponents of the field call the 'antidote to museum fatigue'. Living history is a multi-disciplinary approach to the study and understanding of past cultures and their part in shaping the world in which we live today. According to Gardner's book *Five Minds for the Future*, museums such as these are able to exhibit the traditional trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) as well as that of the quadrivium (music, geometry, astronomy, and arithmetic) which were socially constructed and enacted in the living history museum's 'present' (2006). This is accomplished through the use of different interpretation techniques, using the built environment

as an educational tool, and evaluating and synthesizing objects in their originally intended context. In spite of their differences from traditional museums, each living history museum honors its responsibility as a museum; they collect, preserve, study, and interpret artifacts of historical significance. These institutions place particular emphasis on interpretation and education since they have the ability to conduct both superbly (McGrath, 1989).

There are some academic historians, that feel that the ‘museumization’ of American history produces many of the same inaccuracies and oversimplifications that result from history textbooks (Schlereth, 1991). What they are not able to see is that living history museums are not simply teaching their engaged publics about history, a wide range of academic disciplines are examined and enculturated by museums staff into the exhibits, spaces, and educational programs that take place within their institutions. As institutions, naturalizing the present by imposing part of the past is unavoidable and inevitable as many historiographers will note. There is nothing inherently wrong with this; the challenges of this type of programming come to light when interpreters who are working with the public in these settings do not understand the process of naturalization and let their misinterpretations control their processes (Leone, 1991).

Education at living history institutions

Living history epistemology

Museums struggled over the past several decades with their ability to engage and reengage their audiences. According to Burcaw (1980), this is due to the fact that “traditional history, and in particular the traditional methods of portraying history in indoor museums, is dead; that is, dull and uninteresting, requiring too much intellectual effort and imagination on the part of the visitor (p. 6).” McGrath feels that the qualities that differentiate living history interpretation and exhibit presentation from the programs offered at traditional museums is an emphasis upon processes, active involvement of all the senses, and visitor participation (1989). The majority of living history museums in the United States employ traditional constructivist models; that is they provide their visitors with well formed backdrops and scenarios so that they may process the world and experience it in their individual ways (Witcomb, 2006). This style of educational programming prompts children and other visitors to ‘speak’ in their own right, to use their experiences as a basis of knowledge. The visitors and children are no longer observers, but active participants in their own education. This process petitions visitors to build upon their own preexisting knowledge and experiences, making the learning process entirely unique and individualized (Potter, 2006).

Another pedagogy that is often utilized by living history professionals is what Witcomb (2006) has described as discovery pedagogy. A traditional discovery pedagogy is based upon interactive activities that are:

“informed by a constructivist learning theory... based on a more nuanced understanding of the nature of communication in which the production of

knowledge is embedded in the process of communication and there is an awareness that this is two-way (Witcomb, 2006, p. 359).”

This pedagogy focuses on the material world, but its context is situated in the built environment and real world. There are eight key factors that are fundamental to the museum learning experience that apply to discovery pedagogy as described by Falk and Dierking. These factors fall into three categories; personal context, sociocultural context, and physical context. Personal context refers to the motivations and expectations of an individual before their participation, whatever prior knowledge, interests, and beliefs about the programs they are becoming involved in, along with their own personal choices concerning their visitation to the site. Sociocultural Context applies to the specific within-group sociocultural mediation and aims to facilitate mediation between the visiting group and the interpreter. Lastly, the category of physical context helps to reinforce events and experiences outside the museum through design and advanced organization and orientation for visitors (Falk & Dierking, 2000).

In order for living history museum interpreters and researchers to construct their educational programming in the most effective way possible, they must adhere to the designated principles of museum storytelling. There are many different variations on these principles, for this research the principles detailed by the DiBlaso’s in their paper *Constructing a Cultural Context Through Museum Storytelling* will be used and examined. These principles state that an effective museum story balances entertainment and factual soundness. An effective museum story must be compact, and employ highly visual language. A potent museum story must be personally appealing to visitors and interpreters alike. The DiBlasos assert that museum stories, in order to be effective, must dislodge preconceived stereotypes and invite cross-cultural comparisons whenever possible (1984). To provide visitors with the most potent form of

educational programming it is imperative for living history professionals to draw on diverse fields of inquiry, including but not limited to traditional academic history, landscape architecture, social history, historical geography, folklife and folkways, material culture studies and interpretation, anthropology, humanities studies, archaeology, and experimental types of archaeology like landscape archaeology (McGrath, 1989). These subject areas are all incorporated into the educational programming at living history museums and when incorporated successfully, the visitors are not even aware of the gaps and transitions between subjects and learning activities.

The built environment as an educational tool

The built environment of a living history institution is equally important to the overall educational goals of the institution as the educational programming enacted by employees of that museum. Without the painstakingly researched and reconstructed environments living history educational programming would be confusing and entirely out of context to the institution's visitors. The principle goals of any built environment are detailed in *Interpreting in the built environment: New opportunities for museum education* as 1. To stimulate the participants' awareness of the built environment and its components. 2. To use the built environment as a classroom to study a given subject area. 3. To encourage the participant's active evaluation of his environment through greater understanding of its origins and his options as a resident (Brennan, 1984). For the visitor to fully experience this type of simulation all of their senses must be involved: it must sound, smell, feel, look, and even taste like the past, so that the visitor be immersed in the entire world of the past (McGrath, 1989).

Learning has always been one of the most authoritative allures of the built environment. according to John Dyckman, a leading scholar of built environments and living exhibits, who believes that the reconstructed environment as a workplace is

“expected to inculcate skills, and the city as a play place was expected to provide vices which were at least instructive. The city as a show place was a place to wonder around and gape at... The educative uses of the city have always been too numerous to be included in the curricula of the schools (Brennan, 1984, p. 130),”

or within the walls of a traditional museum. A constructed environment is an ideal laboratory for learning about history, geography, architecture, botany, biology, and much more.

Edward P. Alexander has called the historical museum village to a huge textbook of three-dimensional history, and indeed he could not be more correct (Schlereth, 1984). These built environments and ‘diorama’ like settings are aimed to induce a bit of culture shock in visitors, so that participants can differentiate between the stark differences of the past and today. When living history institutions began to enact change in their programming to complement their built environments they were able to see a dramatic increase in the engagement and overall educational experience of all their visitor demographics (Anderson, 1982). Christopher Bagot, a leading scholar and vindicator of the built environment feels that,

“alongside the main spaces for teaching and learning, those areas given over to arrival and orientation, to relaxation and break out, can be just as important in establishing the overall quality of a learning center. They offer less constrained opportunities to innovate and inspire, with the aim of the design being to encourage informal and unplanned interaction (2006).”

Built environments have an added ability that allows them to teach visitors to an institution about the physical and spatial aspects of the past. These environments are scrupulously researched and detailed so that visitors can soak in the architectural and civic planning that was utilized during the exhibit's past.

These built environments are constructed on the assumption that the folklife and folkways of a region and period in time are of great historical significance. Living history museums collect, preserve, study, and interpret the material culture that was available and relevant to their corresponding periods of history (Anderson, 1984). Material culture can be examined more thoroughly at living history institutions due to the sheer size and space that is available at open air museums. Historians, anthropologists, and architects can examine and scrutinize every aspect of the past because every aspect of past daily life is present in the facility.

Proponents of living history sites cannot stress enough the importance of the proper learning space as a key educational tool. Built environment museums create unique and more open spaces for learning, and they require a higher level of participation than traditional museums (Rogers, 2006). According to Jay Anderson, one of the most prominent scholars writing today about the importance and benefits of living history museums, living history sites and their built environments are playgrounds constructed in order to hide us from the learning we are doing within them (2002).

Object interpretation

What we as a collective citizenry know about the past is largely dependent on what pieces of the material culture have survived through to the present, and a great deal on how we as

historians and knowledgeable museum professionals interpret it. "What we know of our contemporaries, whoever they are, depends on how far we can share their experiences, either directly through a common way of life, or vicariously through anthropological participant-observer fieldwork, trying to grasp how they see the world (Durrans, 1988, p. 145)." An object can function on several different levels. It has a social function, which is not always readily apparent from its physical attributes, a philosophical or ideological function, reflective of any relevant world views. In order to receive the maximum amount of humanistic and behavioral meaning out of living history exhibitions we as programmers must consider the functional level we are displaying objects at (Deetz, 1991). The care and handling of historical objects is much the same at many living history museums as it is at traditional anthropology or history museums. These objects and facets of material culture are considered too delicate and of too great importance to the historical community to be utilized regularly. Living history professionals have come up with a way in which to still have historically significant pieces of cultural history appropriated and in view for the general public to see and to interact with on a kinesthetic level. Objects and material culture at living history museums largely consists of 'artefacts' - carefully crafted reproductions of actual historic objects. By having these 'artefacts' presented for visitors to view, touch, and use, the staff at living history museums are absolved from the curatorial restrictions and traditional responsibilities involved in caring for valuable antiques. The interpretive staff now is able to devote its energy to presenting a realistic picture of their institution's past (Anderson, 1991). These artefacts combined with historically accurate architecture and the overall feel of the institution make up the vast array of 'macroartifacts' that

come together to demonstrate to visitors the significance of the arrangement of these seemingly unimportant objects (Schell, 1985).

Living history museums do not, however, strictly collect and interpret only material culture, they also focus a great deal of their institution's energy and resources on collecting and interpreting the processes and technologies that were employed in their period of history (McGrath, 1989). Interpreters and historians at living history institutions are able to interpret the different interrelations of objects and 'sustained fictions' of the past from a disparate and more interrogative approach than traditional museums (Sherman, 1995). The significance of these new, and elaborate, forms of presentation only become fully evident when a visitor views not the individual exhibition objects but the assemblage of exhibition objects as a whole (Beier-de Haan, 2006). Through an interdisciplinary approach to material and physical culture historic sites have the ability to interpret all aspects of the social, economic, political, religious, cultural influences, and events that existed in the historical period (Schell, 1985).

The material artefacts used in living history programming maintain their original integrity and purpose of their original function through the context of presentation (Leone, 1991). By participating in craft demonstrations, re-enactments, and other activities involving the constructing and use or re-use of objects, visitors can learn a great deal more about a culture than they could from traditional museum exhibits. The goal of any successful living history program involving objects is to recapture the relations of historic production. This can be both the means (technology, amounts, prices, machinery) and the mode (training, division of labor, hours, compensation) with which historical activities took place (Leone, 1991). When the interpretive staff does their job accurately they are able to engage visitors and offer them a significant role in

their process. According to Schlereth, such demonstrations can prompt one to muse about one of the most exciting facets of object study; why do humans create? where does the impulse originate? are the creative ideas of the cobbler, the industrial designer, the architect, or the weaver the same? different? the same and different? how are creative ideas, institutions, and insight actually translated into leather or steel, stone or textile? (1984). Through the educational and interactive experiences offered at living history museums we, as visitors, learn more about ourselves and our own beliefs and opinions when we are in the process of learning about our predecessors and their ways of life.

The methods of living history

A living history program is an important and essential tool to be used in capitalizing on our opportunity to consider the past as a whole. If these programs are properly used, the interest and involvement they can generate can be used to aid the visitor to a clearer perception of the past (Ronsheim, 1974). Living history programming itself is a method for teaching visitors to these types of museums about the values and ways of life that were important to society during their showcased periods. The public involved in this style of learning is noticeably more engaged. Visitors interact with interpreters more freely, they participate in craft activities and then most importantly they ask questions. Living history museum interpreters and their methods provide visitors with a multi-sensory engagement; talking, smelling, questioning, walking, that is preferred by visitors to their traditional museum experiences (Mahoney, 1998). Fortier describes these interpreters as ‘Keepers of Tradition’; these keepers are validated in a museum context only when their activity and engagement begin with the premise that they are custodians of history

and learning, not merely actors in a loosely scripted play (1991). The visitors and participants of living history have in more recent years had their own voices and potential perceptions taken into account by program developers and educators at living history institutions; the visitors at Historic Jamestowne are encouraged to become part of the ensemble environment and are challenged by interpreters to express their own perceptions, emotions, and judgements (Beier-de Haan, 2006).

The most significant characteristic of living history programming is its vitality. Living history helps us to synthesize the mental challenges of the daily workplace with the emotionally satisfying benefits of recreation (Anderson, 1991). In the words of Henry Ford these museums and their interpretational staff would “demonstrate, for educational purposes, the development of American arts, sciences, customs, and institutions by re-producing or re-enacting the conditions and circumstances of such development in a manner calculated to convey a realistic picture (Anderson, 1984, p. 28).” There are three distinct styles of interpretation that are practiced at American living history museums today. These three types of interpretation are very beneficial to the educational programming at museums and other sites that are built on the “premise that the folklife of a region or place is historically significant, and its material culture should be collected, preserved, studied, and most importantly, interpreted (Anderson, 1984). The two most common methods of interpretation practiced at living history museums and sites are ‘first-person’ and ‘third-person’ interpretation (Mahoney, 1998). There is also a third style of interpretation that is less widely utilized by current professionals but is still thought to be generally effective and engaging to visitors; the production of informal and formally staged presentations (McGrath, 1989).

First-person interpretation

First-person interpretation shares many of the same characteristics with role-playing and interactive theatre. Each of the interpreters are dressed in historically appropriate garb and assumes the role of a person situated in their institution's respective period of history. The interpreter will then go about their daily activities and responds to visitor's questions as though these historically significant moments actually happened to them (Mahoney, 1998). This type of interpretation calls for the most education on the part of the interpreter because they must be historically accurate to the best of the institutions and the interpreters ability for this type of interpretation to be effectual and not come across to visitors as being too ridiculous. It is extremely difficult to conduct this type of interpretation credibly. Interpreters must be familiar and comfortable with various types of teaching methods, theatrical techniques, and historic speech patterns to make their interpretation effective and memorable for the visitors. If the interpreter is lacking in any of these methods the visitor's experience will suffer and that educational opportunity will be of no use or benefit to them. Due to these factors and the overwhelming cost of implementing this type of interpretation first person interpretation is rarely utilized exclusively at living history and other outdoor museums (Mahoney, 1998).

Third-person interpretation

Interpreters and actors who are participating in third-person interpretation are dressed in historically appropriate costumes, but they speak and interact with visitors from a twenty-first century perspective (Mahoney, 1998). By using third-person interpretation techniques living history museums and their interpreters can place their historical period in context with greater

ease. Interpreters utilizing this type of living historical interpretation become strategic community leaders and creative teachers within their institutions. The ethical interpreter considers the nature of their interpretation and their teaching abilities, they focus on the needs and desires of the societies; the historical and the contemporary, that they occupy and attempt to serve (Gardner, 2006). According to Nicole Mahoney in her work *That the future may learn from the past: the goals and educational value of living history museums*, this type of interpretation is most effective for interpreters because they do not need to act the part of a seventeenth-century person, they can relay information to visitors about the centuries that followed and explain the consequences of the colonists' actions (1998). Being able to place seventeenth-century history in context does allow visitors to understand the causality of historical events and activities and how they helped to shape our current state as a people and a nation.

Staged presentations and museum theatre

These brief vignettes can be formal or informally stage presentations that happen sporadically or at set times throughout the living history site. This type of interpretation can be described appropriately as 'guerilla theatre'. These seemingly impromptu performances have the ability to draw visitors into the interpretation and to let them freely interact with the interpreters and their expansive knowledge base (McGrath, 1989). These staged presentations are widely utilized at many different types of living history museums and sites due to their brevity and ability to draw the attention of large crowds. By casting aside the monopoly of a structured activity based on scholarly discourse, demonstrations, and exhibitions this can allow visitors and interpreters new possibilities for education through the ways in which these vignettes are staged

(Beier-de Haan, 2006). These interactions have the capacity to provoke exploration, inspire learning, and to implore people to look more thoughtfully at the exhibits (Witcomb, 2006). These simulations must go beyond the tangible. Cultural and historical intangibles are also presented: customs, music, play, beliefs, dance, skills, and language are put on display for the benefit of the visitor (McGrath, 1989). Often living history museums will combine staged presentations and ‘guerilla theatre’ into their chosen type of interpretation, whether it be first-person or third-person, to enhance the educational experience and understanding capabilities of the visitors.

A critique of these interpretation styles critique

James Deetz, a leading scholar in the field anthropology and considered by many in the profession to be one of the founding fathers of historical archaeology, argues that first-person interpretation is the only conceivable and appropriate choice of programming for living history museums. According to Deetz, to not practice first-person interpretation at a living history institution makes it difficult to justify the time, expense, and effort devoted to the creation of these thoroughly researched, documented, and carefully reproduced buildings, artifacts, and costumes (Mahoney, 1998). In spite of this, there is a growing population of scholars and institutions that prefer to utilize third-person interpretation techniques. Proponents of third-person interpretation are quick to point out the difficulties of first-person interpretation in a real world setting. They feel that from the perspective of the visitor first-person interpretation can be threatening and alienating. Many tourists even find the idea of role-playing in an educational institution humorous and try very hard to bring interpreters out of character, thus forgetting about the message and educational viability of the institution (McGrath, 1989). The confusion of first-

person interpretation is illustrated very well by an incident that occurred at the Jamestowne Settlement in the early 1980s. A group of visitors, while watching men drilling with and discharging muskets were so startled by the display of force that they quietly snuck into an adjacent building and notified the Williamsburg police of the 'hostage situation' underway (Mahoney, 1998). Simply stated, some visitors to living history museums do not always understand the concept of first-person interpretation.

There is at present a somewhat contentious debate within the museum education field in the opinion of traditional museums who tend to scoff at the pageantry and extensive interpretation that goes on within the living history museums. This is because for all of the pageantry and engagement, it is very hard to measure experiences such as these, and more importantly, demonstrate its effectiveness to a non-profit board of directors and donor populace (Gruenwald, Koppelman, & Elam, 2007). Because of the near impossible nature of quantitative analysis on the outcomes of an experience such as this, sites that provide it will find it very difficult to retrieve any information in context that is objective and free of bias.

Living History Museum Case Studies

In order to properly address the effectiveness of living history programming' educational quality, it was important for the purposes of this research to spend quality time experiencing the programs that are offered at living history institutions. The selection of these two particular sites came about after extensive research into outdoor living history institutions throughout the United States and the European Union. For the purpose of this research, and to best exemplify the prodigious work that living history institutions are capable of, I selected to focus on two sites;

Colonial Williamsburg, and the partnership between Historic Jamestowne and the Jamestowne Settlement located on the Virginia coast. Among living history museums, these two institutions have been educating and entertaining the public with their historical interpretations and plethora of ever-evolving historical knowledge for the better part of the last century. It is imperative to the evolution of the field of living history that scholars and visitors alike scrutinize and continuously give feedback to these institutions so that their perception of historical events can become more accurate and inclusive. This research was conducted both from extensive literature review and from several days of observation spent at both sites participating in several of the educational programs that they offer. My opinions of these institutions were formed as a tourist, an anthropologist, a museum studies scholar, and an avid lover of history and the study of our collective past.

Historic Jamestowne and the Jamestowne Settlement¹

Historic Jamestowne and the Jamestowne Settlement are a unique set of living history and archaeological museums that can be found in the Historic Triangle of Virginia open air museums. Their mission is,

“to preserve, protect and promote the original site of the first permanent English settlement in North America and to tell the story of the role of the three cultures, European, North American and African, that came together to lay the foundation for a uniquely American form of democratic government, language, free enterprise and society (2007).”

¹ All of the information regarding the educational programming at Historic Jamestowne can be found at their website, <http://historicjamestowne.org/index.php>.

These institutions stand out among other living history museums for their unique cross-disciplinary learning environments and its private/public ownership and management. The Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (Preservation Virginia) has held control of the twenty two and a half acre park since 1893. The National Parks Service (NPS) became partial owner when in 1934 they purchased the remaining fifteen hundred acres that make up the park today. Today the NPS and Preservation Virginia manage and operate the large expanse of land dedicated to the archaeological excavation of the original James Fort, named the Jamestowne Rediscovery project that directly translates archaeological information and discoveries into well informed educational programming at the recreated fort of the Jamestowne Settlement.

The ‘power of place’ and the importance of the built environment are the foundation of an exploratory visit to Historic Jamestowne and the Jamestowne Settlement.

“There is an ethereal, almost magical feeling of standing at the very spot where modern America began. It is a feeling amplified by the exceptional archaeological remains and artifacts that have been found there. This tangible ‘stuff’ of history makes the intangible sense of past people and events intensely close (Straube, 2007).”

This magical feeling and sense of wonder that is inspired in visitors is made possible by the regular updates to the outdoor fort and the Powhatan Indian village. These changes correspond with ongoing archaeological discoveries that have been made by the Jamestowne Rediscovery project (Mahoney, 1998). It is plainly stated by each interpreter that one meets at Jamestowne that our understanding of history is based on our current biases and opinions of what life was like in the past. In the modern world it is becoming more and more fashionable to be egalitarian and

inclusive when reflecting on the past. Over the past decade living history museums like Jamestowne have been incorporating different voices into their programming and productions in pursuit of more democratic programming and the more realistic portrayal of an ‘American civil religion’² (Schlereth, 1991).

Educational development and programming at the Jamestowne Settlement and Historic Jamestowne rely heavily on the built environment as a main teaching tool. The educational programming that is offered at the Jamestowne Settlement is created and designed for a wide demographic range of learners and visitors to the site using a mixture of interpretive methods. Interpreters at Historic Jamestowne use a mixture of third-person interpretation and ‘guerilla theatre’ to effectively and engagingly tell the story of the original James Fort, their Powhatan neighbors, and the world that was changed forever by their meeting. The school group tours are arranged and grouped by academic level, with appropriate tours for grades kindergarden to second, third to fifth, sixth to eighth, and high school. There are also a plethora of educational activities aimed at adults and life-long learners and recently Jamestowne has been creating new programming further promoting the interaction between adults and children as well as more candid interactions between visitors and interpreters (Historic Jamestowne, 2007).

Each of the school group tours combines lessons with history, natural and human ecology, environmentalism, anthropology, and ethnography. The educational programming and tours that are offered by Historic Jamestowne and the Jamestowne Settlement are unique for museums and living history museums in particular. With the advantage of an active on-site archaeological dig, interpreters are able to juxtapose the past and the present, and provide an

² Living history museums cannot survive and compete in the museum world on their educational programming alone. In order to have a successful visitor turnout, institutions like Historic Jamestowne and the Jamestowne Settlement, have to position themselves as “historical shrines to which visitors are beckoned to make pilgrimages (Schlereth, 1991)”.

easily understood context within which to educate visitors. *Touch the Past*, the educational programming in place for students in kindergarden through second grade introduces the aforementioned subjects with a tour of the original James Fort built in 1607. Students are able to examine artifacts left behind by the original settlers and are lead through exercises and activities that ask them to focus on the natural world of early Virginia and how the settlers shaped and manipulated the land and their natural resources for survival. *Touch the Past* allows young students to interact with the environment of James Fort, to identify edible vegetation, and to understand the processes; cooking cleaning, building, and so on, of the pre-colonial settlers' life. The school tour appropriate for students in third to fifth grade is *Discovering James Fort*, a hands-on/minds-on³ introduction to archaeology with the Jamestowne Rediscovery team. The interpreters leading the program use the existing archaeology and artifact knowledge to educate students about the earliest forms of the British and Powhatan politics, government, and society in early Virginia (Historic Jamestowne, 2007).

History Quest, the educational program for middle school aged students, addresses the importance of the sciences when learning about history and the archaeological process. *History Quest* focuses on the sciences of today and the past and explores how the sciences and scientific inquiry have shaped our understandings of pre-colonial American history. The final educational program offered to student groups at Historic Jamestowne and the Jamestowne Settlement is for high school aged students is called *Making History*, students involved in this program are able to work side by side with Jamestowne Rediscovery archaeologists and interpreters to expand on recent views of life in James Fort for Africans, Native Americans, women, children, tradesmen,

³ According to Witcomb, a 'minds-on' approach to the appropriation of knowledge is considerably more effective and democratic than a traditional 'hands-on' approach which deals primarily with the tactile elements of learning. It is when these two approaches are combined that the educators at Jamestowne are able to see more effective learning taking place in their student groups.

and indentured servants. These new voices are able to impart a more realistic and democratic view of life for all the citizens of Virginia during the fort's history.

Historic Jamestowne has many other types of educational experiences beyond those offered at their sites. The educational department at Historic Jamestowne and Stories Past⁴ through a grant from the Virginia Business Education Partnership, has brought their museum experience to the world wide web. Currently there are two interactive web-based activities that can be engaged with, free of charge for any student who wishes. The *Artifact Module* is a fun lesson in archaeology that teaches participants proper exhumation and labeling processes. Going through the module students are asked to 'dig' in a square plot to uncover Jamestowne's buried history. Then the participants are required to document their findings with appropriate measurements and descriptions. The *Artifact Module* teaches participants about the importance of proper documentation and analysis when dealing with historical objects and ideas. The *Buildings Module* activity deals with archaeological interpretation and asks participants to examine the remains of a building and to recreate it to the best of their ability from the evidence that is displayed before them. This module helps visitors to the site explore the process by which Jamestowne interpreters and designers construct the built environment used in the on-site educational programming provided at the Jamestowne Settlement. The online educational modules that are employed by the Historic Jamestowne website are perfect complementary activities that could be used by teachers during their class time as an introductory tool to the educational programming they will experience on a trip to Historic Jamestowne.

The educational programs offered at the Jamestowne Settlement and Historic Jamestowne are designed using mainly third-person interpretation methods and techniques. Interpreters at

⁴ Stories Past is a website developing agency that partners with museums and historical institutions to bring their exemplary educational programming to the online universe. <http://www.storiespast.com/>

Jamestowne are educated and motivated to become creative teachers and strategic leaders. According to Gardner, the use of third-person interpretation helps to synthesize the current state of knowledge in the field and interpret it into something more comprehensible for visitors to relate to and understand (2006). These keepers of tradition effectively engage and inspire learning in the students that for whom they interpret. Through participant observation it is clear that interpreters enlighten visiting students with demonstrations of folkways and historical processes, all while putting the historical information they are presenting into a real world context that even modern learners can appreciate and understand. Historic Jamestowne interpretation focuses upon the processes of historical life; visitor participation is an imperative part of the programming and is useless if all of the senses are not actively engaged (McGrath, 1989). The online educational programs that Historic Jamestowne offers prove that it is not an impossible task to continue to engage learners of all ages, involving more of their modern senses and sensibilities, even when they are not visiting the institution.

Schlereth claims that many living history sites do not sufficiently encourage their visitors to go beyond their exhibited programs and delve further into the bibliographic and research information that they have compiled to put together their programming (1991). Historic Jamestowne has come up with a way to easily engage visitors to the site with their extensive background information; the Archaearium (Straube, 2007). The Archaearium is the exhibit space developed in 2007 to focus on,

“the Virginia Company period [of history] and reveal a new understanding of the first English settlers, their relationship with the Virginia Indians, their endeavors and struggles, and how they lived, died and shaped a new society. Visitors will discover how archaeologists found the fort and encounter displays of arms and

armor, medical instruments, personal objects, ceramics, tools, coins, trade items, musical instruments, games, amusements and food remains (Historic Jamestowne, 2007).”

The overall educational programming at Historic Jamestowne and the Jamestowne Settlement, complemented by the exhibits housed in the Archaearium and the available online resources, are effective tools to inspire learning and greater understanding of the past and its many congruent subjects. Interpreters are continuously incorporating a sense of wonder into their programs that are aimed at young students, inviting them to marvel at the ways in which ‘others’ lived and how they are not so different from our ways. At the same time these interpreters are successfully able to instill the democratic ideals that were present in the first James Fort and are able to incorporate an understanding of these ideals and their changes over time effectively into their programming for more mature students. Historic Jamestowne and the Jamestowne Settlement draw in visitors with their compelling and realistic portrayal of the past, and through their use of subdued pageantry to effectively make students care about the learning that they are taking part in.

Colonial Williamsburg⁵

The restoration of Williamsburg began with the dream of William Goodwin, rector of the Burton Parish Church. In order to procure funding he went to John D. Rockefeller and implored him to help preserve and promote Williamsburg as the cradle of the American Republic (Anderson, 1984). Together John D. Rockefeller, William Goodwin, and teams of highly trained

⁵ Any further information regarding the education programs at Colonial Williamsburg can be located at <http://www.history.org/>

historians and architects restored 82 historic buildings and reconstructed 341 buildings from the historical record. Mr. Rockefeller's meticulous attention to detail is perhaps what made this undertaking so prolific. "When architects discovered that they had reconstructed a house six feet from where new research showed it had actually stood, he [Rockefeller] immediately provided the money to move it. "No scholar", he said, "must ever be able to come to us and say we have made a mistake" (Wallace, 1991, p. 190)." Mr. Rockefeller oversaw the operations and development of Colonial Williamsburg until his death in 1960. At a cost of seventy nine million dollars to complete restorations, Colonial Williamsburg is the largest living history attraction in the United States (Danilov, 2010).

According to the mission set down by John D. Rockefeller in the late 1920s, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation operates the world's largest living history museum in Williamsburg, Virginia—the restored 18th-century capital of Britain's largest, wealthiest, and most populous outpost of empire in the New World. Here we interpret the origins of the idea of America, conceived decades before the American Revolution. The Colonial Williamsburg story of a revolutionary city tells how diverse peoples, having different and sometimes conflicting ambitions, evolved into a society that valued liberty and equality. Americans cherish these values as a birthright, even when their promise remains unfulfilled (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2011). In Colonial Williamsburg there are 301-acres of historically restored, reconstructed, and historically furnished buildings, lawns, and fortifications. Every day, costumed interpreters tell the stories of the men and women of this important 18th-century city. Each perspective, the black, white, and native American, slave, indentured, and free are all on

display. “In this historic place, we help the future learn from the past (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2011).”

In recent years Colonial Williamsburg has begun to implement change into their offered programs and educational opportunities in order to keep their museum story more accurate and historically relevant. Cary Carson, Vice President of research at Colonial Williamsburg, believes that the visiting public has had more influence on their educational programming and interpretation than social historians. Indeed the opinions of the public are regularly monitored, polled, and taken into account so that Colonial Williamsburg can present a more accurate and democratic view of the past (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2011).

“That the future may learn from the past”, is the official position of Colonial Williamsburg and its educational programs and tours. They have preserved historical houses, sites, and artifacts in order to teach the public about the past - how our predecessors lived, what their landscape looked like, what techniques were used for taming it, and so on. Colonial Williamsburg attempts to reproduce the “authentic setting in which the Virginia patriots strove to establish the rights of the people (2011).” Some of the concepts that are explored in the educational programming at Colonial Williamsburg include responsible leadership, the integrity of the individual, individual liberties, self government, and economic opportunity (Lowenthal, 1991).

Colonial Williamsburg has a wide range of programs, tours, and activities that make it a suitable learning environment for visitors and learners of all ages. This mainly outdoor institution has been providing quality educational programs and experiences since the park was first

conceived by John D. Rockefeller and William Goodwin in 1927 (Anderson, 1984). Trained guides at Colonial Williamsburg are highly educated and able to

“present age-appropriate history of the years between 1700 and 1781 and lead groups through public buildings, colonial homes, and trade shops while discussing daily life in the 1700s. The tour guide will highlight information related to the National Social Studies Standards for government, citizenship, and colonial life in a British colony, and they will visit sites and engage in hands-on activities that bring those standards to life (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2011).”

Similarly to the educational programs at Historic Jamestowne and the Jamestowne Settlement, Colonial Williamsburg divides its educational tours by age range. Students from kindergarden to third grade are given different experiences than those given to students in the range of fourth to fifth grade, or from middle school students and high school students.

The tour that is appropriate for kindergarden to third grade aged students highlights the cross-disciplinary topics of history, geography, economics, and civics. The interpreters focus their student’s educational experiences on the people who occupied Williamsburg and worked towards liberty and independence during the seventeen hundreds. This tour incorporates all of the diverse peoples and their backgrounds that made up society in eighteenth century Williamsburg. The multi-cultural aspect of this tour helps students to understand that history was not entirely shaped by the white majority as it is often thought. Many diverse people shared in the formation of American ideas of liberty and freedom and this tour tries to make that understandable to young children. Colonial Williamsburg’s tour offered for fourth and fifth grade classrooms focuses on the environment of Williamsburg and the ways in which it was shaped by

it's colonial inhabitants. Interpreters focus their time and efforts on teaching the students about the "land and its first inhabitants, colonization and conflict, revolution and the new nation, and political growth and western expansion (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2011)."

Middle school aged students participating in Colonial Williamsburg's educational programming focus their time spent on the site learning about the civics and economics that were readily present during the colonial period. These students are considered at an age that it is appropriate to introduce them to the principles of America's constitutional government. These students are taught about ideas such as 'consent of the governed', rule of law, democracy, limited government, and government by the people. The Colonial Williamsburg program guide states that in this program "students learn that citizenship is the cornerstone of a republic and that founding fathers learned, discussed, and debated the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in Williamsburg and then created a nation based on those principles (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2011)." High school students learn about the constitutional history of Virginia and its integral part in creating the United States Constitution. They explore the colony's constitution and are made to understand how the writing of this constitution influenced the course of the colonies and the rest of America. These students explore the Age of Enlightenment through the writings of Americans like John Locke and George Mason and are made to understand these great men's contributions to the writings of Thomas Jefferson.

Colonial Williamsburg also offers special tours for band and choral groups who wish to visit the institution. These tours are given to student groups of twenty five to seventy five students. The students are also encouraged and asked to perform during their visit in one of Colonial Williamsburg's many public spaces. This is a wonderful way for students of music to learn about the history of their craft in America and to take part in recreating the music of the

past for the enjoyment of themselves and their fellow visitors (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2011). Another unique portion of the educational programming offered by Colonial Williamsburg is their online field trips and educational packages. If a school or interested teacher is unable to visit the site, Colonial Williamsburg offers fun, engaging, and interactive electronic field trips. Each year the electronic field trips are re-done to give participating teachers, students, and academics an up-to-date and inclusive experience of Colonial Williamsburg.

Each tour that is offered at Colonial Williamsburg is customized to comply with the educational curriculum and criteria of its respective grade, all while introducing these children to new concepts about their history in fun and engaging ways. Schlereth believes that living history museum curators and interpretational staff rely too heavily on craft demonstrations when interacting with their audiences. Craft demonstrations alone do not give visitors the sense of change or historical process that many living history institutions aim to portray (1991). In order to avoid this pitfall of the living history world, interpreters and curators at Colonial Williamsburg are of an exceptional educational and instructional caliber who enjoy their employment. Their enjoyment and pride in the work they do will shine through the simple craft demonstrations offered along these tours and permeate itself into the educational experience of the youth. Today, Colonial Williamsburg does not “simply borrow and display a historical aura; it embodies a vision of a total social order (Wallace, 1991).”

Not everyone in the fields of education or history feel that Colonial Williamsburg does an exemplary job of portraying the past as it likely actually was. Since the democratization of the museum story began to take place in the early 1970s there has been a cry from scholars and historians alike that Colonial Williamsburg does not represent the African and slave populations that were the backbone of colonial Williamsburg. In her article published in 1984 titled *Colonial*

Williamsburg: A Black Perspective, Martin harshly reprimands the administrators and scholars who were then employed by Colonial Williamsburg for their 'white-centric' attitudes and non-comprehensive view of the past. Indeed, before 1995 there were few African Americans employed by Colonial Williamsburg and those that were, had been hired on as maintenance and service employees. In the last decade Colonial Williamsburg has overhauled their educational programs and employed staff to represent a more historically accurate presentation of the past (Martin, 1984, p. 191).

Although great strides have been taken to democratize and include multi-cultural aspects of Colonial Williamsburg's prominent history it is not readily apparent in the educational programs that are conducted within the 300-acre confines of the site. The group tour designed for kindergarden to third grade students which I observed is the only tour that specifically highlights multi-culturalism in the colonial world and its resounding impacts throughout history. For Colonial Williamsburg to be a more effective educational institution it still has some great strides to take in making the Colonial Williamsburg story more inclusive and relevant to the highly globalized students of today.

Conclusion

It is impossible to recount the educational programming at institutions like Colonial Williamsburg and Historic Jamestowne to someone who has never been there. Walking through the streets and forest paths that once supported the footsteps of our founding fathers and mothers

is a feeling so etherial it cannot be simply put into words. William Goodwin articulated the feel of Williamsburg when pitching the restoration project to John D. Rockefeller.

“If you have ever walked around Williamsburg lake on a moonlit night, when most of the people... are fast asleep, and felt the presence and companionship of the people who used to live here in the long gone years, and remembered the things they stood for, and pictured them going into or coming out of the old houses... you would then know what an interesting place Williamsburg is. You would realize it is about the most interesting place in America (Anderson, 1984, p. 30).”

Places like Jamestowne and Colonial Williamsburg understand that their publics learn best from the experiences and interactive participation that they provide and facilitate. The integration of entertainment and education, along with multiple forms of communication have made living history museums livelier and more engaging places for visitors to attend (Pitman, 1999).

Colonial Williamsburg and Historic Jamestowne have been diligently re-tooling their educational programs in order to stay relevant to today’s visitors and to create a more realistic picture of what life was truly like for all members of a community in the past (Martin Felton, 1984). These changes have come about due to the public’s ever increasing involvement with the institutions. Living history’s most effective and significant characteristic is its vitality and energy. The vitality that it possesses is in large part due to the overwhelming support that the public has for living history programs within museums. This is a direct product of the movement’s fondness for experimentation with historical interpretation and simulation

(Anderson, 1991). Another factor that contributes to the success of living history as an educational tool is the museum's ability to

“illustrate the misinterpretive or masking process, the ideological process wherein society appropriates the history and culture of others to ground its own in what seems to be the natural state of things. By illuminating the processes that make up historical interpretation, these same interpreters create a consciousness of history within their audiences (Leone, 1991, p. 180).”

According to Grove there should be no doubt among academics and enthusiasts as to the potency of living history programs. These programs have the opportunity to “quicken the mind and make it work in new ways, to exalt the spirit, to open avenues of perception and discovery (1984, p. 16).” These places help learners to create their own ‘museum of memory’. An individual's sense of touch, taste, and smell are often more influential to their overall learning capabilities than that of simply sight alone (Pitman, 1999). Visitors to Historic Jamestowne and the Jamestowne Settlement, along with those who attend programs at Colonial Williamsburg are given countless ways to interact with the space and create their own unique memories and learning paths. This is a level of engagement that is rarely seen at traditional anthropological and history focused museums.

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