LIVING HISTORY AS PERFORMANCE:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE MANNER IN WHICH HISTORICAL NARRATIVE
IS DEVELOPED THROUGH PERFORMANCE

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2006

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the twentieth century, historians have sought a variety of new ways to engage history, many through the use of performance techniques. New methodologies aided by technology have allowed historians to gain new insights into the past and share those insights with the public. In this study I examine how four methodologies have influenced each other in attempt to achieve this goal: two living history museums: Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation; one outdoor historical drama, *Trumpet in the Land*; three examples of experimental archaeology: the Pamunkey Project, Buckskinner, and the Washburn-Norlands Center; and two PBS productions about living in the past: *Frontier House* and *Colonial House*. These categories have two things in common. First they are all attempting to examine some aspect or event from the past, second they all use performance techniques to do this.

My argument for this study lies in a two-fold examination. First, in discussing the constructs of each of these methodologies, I argue that it is apparent that the first three categories have been highly influential in the development of the fourth. Second, the misuse of performance techniques has proven ultimately problematic for the PBS productions in their declared efforts to take a step back in time. With the exception of the outdoor historical dramas, which I use as an obvious example of performance and history coming together, those involved with the other categories tend to distance themselves from being associated with other theatrical endeavors believing that such an association diminishes their efforts. These attitudes tend to be based in antitheatrical sentiments which prove to be counter productive to their goals of better engaging past.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The accomplishment of this degree could not have happened without the encouragement and support of my friends, family, and colleagues. I would like to first acknowledge the patience and diligence of my advisor, Jim Forse. His help in the molding of this work was the perfect balance of advising and listening that allowed me room to express myself while maintaining a professional focus in the writing. As I entered the final throws of completing my dissertation, my committee members, Cynthia Baron, Jonathan Chambers, and Bill Armaline, guided me toward completion with their helpful and insightful advice into my work.

Yonghee Lee, Michael Coon, and Nancy Kennedy were fellow students also working toward their PhDs in the same program of study. We were there for each other through the ups and downs of being graduate students. I am the last of the cadre to walk the final mile.

This process has been especially trying on my family who has been patient and supportive in their expectation of not only me but also my sister in achieving doctoral degrees. Through the delays and frustrations, they have always been there with encouraging words. Last but definitely not least, I wish to give my heartfelt thanks to Tracy Tupman. His help in the research and editing of this work was invaluable. Above all, he never allowed me to become discouraged. He lived with me through this process as I lived through his, always there with encouragement or chocolate.

The list goes on too long for me to be able to thank all those I wish to thank. If you were not mentioned by name, know that you are in my grateful heart.
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INTRODUCTION

History and Performance: The Museum Comes Alive

Theatre and historical methodology have long standing links. As ancient men regaled their audiences with their adventures and excitement of the hunt, they were engaged in performing a version of historic narrative. As the Greek poets told and retold the story of the Iliad and the Odyssey, they were performing what they believed happened in the past. In fifth-century BCE Athens, performances of Greek legends and history would be expanded to full productions on a stage with actors, costumes, masks, and props. Medieval theatre in Western Europe sought to portray and teach the events of Biblical history. The Shakespearean stage sought to perform England’s history, and down to the present day historic events have been played out on the stage and screen as a means of engaging the past, and as a way to understand or come to terms with the significance of those events. Though critics have questioned the historical authenticity of these representations, the act of performing history is as old as theatre itself. Conversely, the same cannot be said of historians using performance to further their understanding of history. As performers have combed the history books for dramatic material, historians have been slow in recognizing the advantages of performance as a means of accessing this same history. It was only in the twentieth century that some historians have come to realize that “living” the history may afford new insights into the past. This realization has led to the rise of living history museums. Even though these museums have extensive public popularity, academia still does not readily recognize their reenactments as legitimate historic research. Yet, the development of the history museum has led to the merging of performance and history in the attempt to bring history alive to the general public and researchers a living laboratory through which first hand simulations of historical possibilities can be posited.

The most recent manifestation of living history has been edited televised productions that document the experience of families living in carefully constructed time capsules. Beginning in
1999, such programs have been airing on BBC and PBS: *The 1900 House*, *Frontier House*, *1940s House*, *Manor House*, *The Ship*, and *Colonial House*. The premise of these shows is based on several families volunteering to live in a reconstruction of another time for a specified period of time. This new approach to historical engagement is a product of the influence of various other constructs: the living history museums, experimental archeology and reality TV. Performance has been an integral part of these creations. The use of performance techniques in the television productions has taken attributes of these methodologies to create a new form of “living history.”

**Living History**

The phrase “living history” can have different meanings depending on where the emphasis is put, either living *history* or living *history*. The first refers to history that is brought alive, the second history that is lived. The distinction is subtle. An example of the first would be living history museums, the second would be about people like the Buckskinners whereby historical recreation is part of a lifestyle choice. An exploration into the first is necessary to understand the genesis of the second.

Institutions that seek to bring history alive are referred to under a variety of names: outdoor history museums, open-air museums, or living history museums. Whatever they may be called, these museums represent a further development of historic preservation that attempts to access history through live performance. Jay Anderson has written several books about living history and the history of living museums. He defines living history as “an attempt by people to simulate life in another time” (“Living” 291). Anderson has determined that there are three basic reasons why people become involved with living history projects:

To interpret material culture more effectively, usually at a living museum; to test an archeological thesis or generate data for historical ethnographies; and to participate in an enjoyable recreational activity that is also a learning experience.
It can be used as a research and interpretive tool for better understanding the culture of one’s counterparts in other times and places. It can also serve as a medium for acting out in a socially acceptable behavior not commonly encountered in the contemporary world; for example, dressing up in armour and fighting with swords and shields, hunting wild game with the muzzle loader. ("Living" 291)

Along with this definition, he acknowledges the performative quality found in living history. It is obviously theatrical with its use of costume (period clothing), props (artifacts), sets (historical sites), role playing (identifying with historical characters), and the designation of time in space as special and somehow not part of our ordinary everyday world. ("Living" 291)

Through living history projects, two differing disciplines, history and theatre, have come together to take the past away from the two-dimensional narrative found in books and create a three-dimensional portrayal of the past. The living museum developed from the random collection of artifacts displayed in early museums to the categorizing and organizing of these artifacts in later museums, to contextualizing artifacts historically in dioramas, to historic simulations in life size dioramas. The performative quality of these living history projects introduces a new dynamic. In a living museum, an individual can see, hear, touch, and smell the history come alive around him or her. This is exemplified at Plimoth Plantation where one can see reconstructions of the houses and “inhabitants” roaming the dirt street; hear the barnyard animals and wood being chopped; smell lunch being cooked over an open hearth and possibly have a taste.

Yet, for some attendees, to merely see, hear, touch, and smell the history is not enough. They yearn to physically experience the history for themselves, “participate in an enjoyable recreational activity that is also a learning experience” ("Living" 291). These are the people who wish to live the history. Away from museums, archeology, and other scholarly endeavors, groups of ordinary people whose only qualifications may lie in a deep seated interest in a given
historic period or event, create authentic costumes and accouterments, and set out to recreate a favorite moment in history. Such groups would include the Society for Creative Anachronism, Buckskinners, and Civil War re-enactors. Yet, how authentic is this past that is being recreated and performed? Is it even possible to recreate the past? In many cases, these recreations strive to achieve as historically authentic a picture of the past as possible; while for others, nostalgia may play as strong a role as any historical fact.

Nostalgia and Counter Memory

An historical narrative is a construct that is theoretically based on empirical evidence. Yet some narratives, especially those based on memory, tend to describe a past that reflect an edited version of the past, usually referred to as a nostalgic perception of the past, which often does not stand up to historical scrutiny. The word nostalgia was coined by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer in the seventeenth century. He was investigating a malady that seemed to affect Swiss mercenaries fighting away from their homes. These mercenaries experienced symptoms such as despondency, melancholy, and, in some cases, were physically wasting away. Today we would refer to this as “homesickness.” Contemplation of suicide was not uncommon (Davis 2). Hofer categorized these symptoms as a disease calling it “nostalgia,” a word from the Greek literally meaning a physical disease, “algia,” caused by the melancholy from being away from one’s home. The view that nostalgia was a treatable, physical disease persisted into the twentieth century when a shift in understanding occurred based on the growing study of psychology. Doctors began to perceive these symptoms in terms of what we would call “homesickness,” a malady more of the mind than the body. Although it is no longer considered a disease, per se, nostalgia has been recognized as an affliction brought on by given circumstances:

[Professionals] from the most mechanistic and the physiological to the existential and psychological, draw on some notion of sudden alteration, sharp transition, a marked discontinuity in life experience to explain the phenomenon. (Davis 2)
The popular view of the term nostalgia is associated with a longing for a past which is perceived as having been a golden time, and, by comparison, a better time than today. Some scholars make a distinction among types of nostalgia. Fred Davis, in his book *Yearning for Yesterday*, limits the ability to feel nostalgic to events which occurred within a person’s own lifetime. He does not believe that anyone can feel nostalgic for a time that he or she did not experience. He defines nostalgia as a feeling by a person for their own past and categorizes a feeling toward a distant or historic past as antiquarian. Since he believes nostalgia is based on “fondly remembered material,” feeling a strong connection toward a time or place not experienced represents a powerful identification toward that time or place in the person, not a nostalgic perception (Davis 8).

Susan Bennett in her book *Performing Nostalgia* makes no such distinction maintaining the broader concept of the term.

Nostalgia is constituted as a longing for certain qualities and attributes in lived experience that we have apparently lost, at the same time as it indicates our inability to produce parallel qualities and attributes which would satisfy the particularities of lived experience in the present . . . . It leans on an imagined and imaginary past which is more and better than the present and for which the carrier of the nostalgia, in a defective and diminished present, in some way or other longs. (5)

For the purposes of this study, I use the term in its broader connotation recognizing the complexity inherent in the concept. Though the nostalgic feeling can be triggered by memory of a personal experience, the concept can go beyond mere remembrance, history, or recollection, and can include a feeling toward the understanding of a past not personally experienced. Bennett’s nostalgic memory is usually framed in juxtaposition with the present. The problem with a nostalgic memory in comparison to a historical accounting is that nostalgic memory tends to rely on forgetting as much as remembering; it tends to be a constructed “memory” whether based on learned or experiential knowledge.
Just as nostalgic views of the past tend to be constructed by forgetting or ignoring certain aspects, recent historians have acknowledged that many cherished historical narratives have also been constructed leaving out various perspectives. Much of new historicism focuses on these forgotten voices in the attempt to create newer more inclusive narratives based on what George Lipsitz calls counter-memory.

Counter-memory is a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal. Unlike historical narratives that begin with the totality of human existence and then locate specific actions and events within that totality, counter-memory starts with the particular and the specific and then builds outward toward a total story. Counter-memory looks to the past for the hidden histories of those excluded from dominant narratives. . . . .counter-memory demands revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past. (Lipsitz 162)

Many contemporary historians utilize the concept of counter-memory to rewrite history so as to give primacy to what was forgotten against what hegimonically was remembered. Though myth and history may be part of the creation of counter-memory, they are not the sum total of the counter-memory construct (Lipsitz 162). Counter-memory paradigms have been used extensively by historians researching the place in history of women and minorities whose part in history seem to have been overlooked or just forgotten. This approach to history is especially useful to performance reconstructions as women and minorities seek to recreate roles where scant information exists. One difference between Lipsitz’s conception of counter-memory and Davis’ definition of nostalgia is that counter-memory includes history that goes beyond personal experience. Both considerations of the past elicit a variety of emotions that seem to defy a strict historical narrative and encourage nostalgic remembrances. These counter-memories play a part in the construction of the living history museums. The nostalgic memories tend to be the impetus behind popularity of the living history museums and the desire for such a large number of people wanting to volunteer for the PBS productions.
Though nostalgia may color the historical perceptions of the volunteers with the PBS productions and visitors to the living history sites, recreating historical eras is still the goal of these venues and avoiding giving into these nostalgic desires. Yet those involved in these recreations, in whatever capacity, insist on maintaining that what they are doing is not to be construed in any way as theatre. I argue that this attitude is problematic to their achieving their goals and has its roots in antitheatrical biases that have existed since the beginning of theatre, itself.

Antitheatricalism

The belief that theatre is bad for society is usually traced back to Plato. For various reasons throughout history, such as political or religious concerns usually related to control and power, theatre has been the focus of distrust and prejudice, in some cases to the point of being outlawed. Plato’s problem with theatre was due to the imitative nature of the art. Since imitation is so far removed from truth, it was not to be allowed in his Republic. He clarifies his position stating:

The poet is an imitator of what he knows nothing about, of a mere appearance. The imitator know nothing worth mentioning of what he imitates, but his imitation is a sort of game and not serious, and all who undertake tragic poetry in iambic poems and in epics are imitators in the full sense of the word. . . .Imitation art is an inferior who marries an inferior, and has inferior offspring. . . . It is clear that the mimetic poet is not naturally inclined to the rational part of the soul and his wisdom is not directed to its satisfaction, if he wishes to be acceptable to the many, but in order to be pleasing in his imitation he deals with the disturbed and unsettled character. (Republic 387)

Those seeking to discredit theatre will turn time and again to Plato for justification of their position. One of the earliest Christian diatribes against theatre was by Tertullian (155-220
CE) in his work *On the Spectacles*. He echoes Plato when he declared that “the Author of truth hates all the false; He regards as adultery all that is unreal” (Dukore 92). His writings would fuel the Christian prejudice against theatre.

Theatre became the focus of intense censorship during the early years of the middle ages, post-St. Augustine. It tended to fail the three criteria for the standards of living: morality, reality, and utility. It would not be long before these objections would be reconsidered as they discovered a use for theatre to teach Christian doctrine (Bruch).

Throughout the Middle Ages, the church slowly relented on its diatribe against theatre. The battle, though, was to be reengaged as a new voice arose with prejudicial vehemence against theatre. This was the era of the Reformation which was good and bad for theatre. The challenging of, and subsequent reduction of the overwhelming power, that the church had over western society enabled new thoughts and perspectives to be explored. This would allow for greater expression on the stage. This same movement would also create the Puritans who would take up the banner to rid society of this plague disguised as art. All the ills of society were blamed on the theatre by the Puritans. These crimes included:

- Emptying the churches, perpetuating pagan custom, distorting truth, showing forth profane, seditious, and bawdy stories, teaching knavery and lechery, causing God to visit the plague on London, leading youths into idleness and extravagance, affording meeting places for harlots and customers, aiding the Pope, and corrupting maidens and chaste wives. (Bruch)

Many of these Puritan protesters most likely had not only no knowledge of theatre practices but had probably never stepped into a theatre. Some, like Steven Gosson and Phillip Stubbs who had worked in the theatre, believed that the theatre needed drastic reforming. Their accusations were based on early writings such as Tertullian, St. Augustine, and the Bible. Even though the Bible only mentions theatre once (Acts XIX, 39), this lack of attention became an argument against theatre in that if the Bible does not talk about it, it has no place in Christian society. During the seventeenth century, the Puritans gained enough power in Parliament that
they were able to put their views into law. One of the first things they did was ban theatre and tear down all the stages. Though Charles II would reestablish theatre in England in 1660, theatre would continue to have a love/hate relationship with society and their respective governments. Theatre has always been the target of paranoid governments. As recent as the 1960s, playwrights in Eastern Europe were jailed for their plays that spoke out against the government.

Though many of the concerns that the Puritans had against theatre are no longer prevalent, vestiges of the old criteria of reality still exist. It is upon this consideration that those involved with living history focus their criticism of theatre. The outdoor historical dramas have received their fare share of criticism for their abridgment of “true” history or that what they are portraying is a fake history. This criticism ignores the fact that these venues do not claim to be presenting precise enactments of the events but the essence of them. Much of their inability lies in time and space constraints inherent with these venues. How theatre attempts to engage historical events is examined in the chapter on outdoor historical dramas.

This idea that theatre is fake, it lies, and is not real can be traced back to Plato and his rejection of the art from his ideal society. If it is fake then history portrayed on stage is inherently unreal, therefore we do not want to be mistaken for theatre because we want our history to be accepted as real. This prevalent antitheatrical view of theatre is what has kept the living history venues from utilizing performance techniques to their fullest advantage especially the PBS productions, much to their detriment, as this study will reveal.

Performance and Acting

This study argues that performance techniques should be an important part of living history museums and the PBS productions. Those associated with the living history museums attempt to distance themselves from being considered theatre by refraining from calling their activities performances and referring to the employees as interpreters rather than actors. There are several reasons for their need to distance themselves from theatre, not the least of which is
the previously discussed ingrained anti-theatrical bias. To counter their arguments, I need to first define what constitutes a performance and acting.

Part of the problem with their bias is that they are basing their understanding of performance and acting on a binary believing that one is either performing or one is not. It is very black and white thinking. Both acting and performing actually should be considered in much broader terms based on a continuum of complexity. What this means is that at one end of the spectrum, there are some activities that, due to their context, would be difficult to classify as a performance or as any form of acting. This could be referred to as a non-performance or non-acting. One such example would be a person running a register at a grocery store. What that person is doing would be perceived as a non-performance or an ordinary day-to-day action. Now if that person were on stage before an audience and repeating this action from night to night, the complexity of the action would have reached the other side of the spectrum and would be perceived of as a performance and the person, an actor. The context of the typical grocery store and the grocery store on a stage changes the action into a performance. Between these two points is a wide range of performances at differing levels of complexity.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, the varying complexity of performances has been the center of much of the discourse within theatre studies. The envelope continues to be pushed to the point that the concept of performance seems to defy definition. Many theatre departments have reconsidered their programs changing the focus from theatre studies to performance studies in an attempt to include all the new variables that have arisen. Many scholars believe that the major break from conventional forms of theatre occurred during the 1960s with the work of artists like Jerzy Grotowski and the Polish Theatre, Richard Schechner and the Performance Group, and Julian Beck and Judith Molina with the Living Theatre. They experimented with new ways of considering the script, space, character, and the relationship with the audience. Less was more, with one of the extreme examples being the “happenings.” Many of these changes have come to fall under categories such as avant-garde or performance art.
Richard Schechner, one of the leading scholars on performance theory, defines performance not by what it is but by what it does:

Spectators are very aware of the moment when performance takes off. A “presence” is manifest, something has “happened.” The performers have touched or moved the audience, and some kind of collaboration, collective special theatrical life, is born. (11)

RoseLee Goldberg, in her book *Performance Art*, describes the development of the new theatre of the 1960s, tracing the history of theatrical change through performances such as the work of Schechner and the attempt to further define performance, as difficult as that may be. She places most of these performances into the larger context of performance art which she states is:

A permissive, open-ended medium with endless variables, executed by artists impatient with the limitations of more established art forms, and determined to take their art directly to the public. (9)

Though she uses the term performance art, as often as not the “art” part of the term is dropped and she is inclusive of all that constitutes performance in her discussions. The performers she discusses “use performance in trying to live, and who create work which takes life as its subject” (9).

Happenings may be the form of performance that relates closest to the endeavors of the living history museums. Marvin Carlson in his book *The Art of Performance*, states: “‘Pure happenings’ are very loosely structured, encourage improvisation, tend to envelop audiences, and are rarely if ever done in traditional theatrical spaces” (98). Though the point of happenings is to have the audiences experience what they believe to be an unique event as it is “happening,” seemingly unrehearsed and spontaneous, these performances tend to be highly rehearsed and intricately staged. Michael Kirby outlined the influence that happenings had on every aspect of theatre stating:

Scripts have lost their importance and performances are created collectively, the physical relationship of audience and performance has been altered in many
different ways and has been made an inherent part of the piece, audience
participation has been investigated, “found” spaces rather than theatres have been
used for performance and several different places employed sequentially for the
same performance, there has been an increased emphasis on movement and on
visual imagery. (“On Acting” 12)

It is this definition that readily categorizes the living history museums as a form of
performance and inherently involving performance techniques. It is through Goldberg’s,
Schechner’s, and Kirby’s descriptions of performance that I am positioning this assertion.

What constitutes acting can also be considered in terms of a continuum. The living
history museums perceive acting as either/or; one is either acting or is not. This binary is
obviously based on personal judgments. When asked how one differentiates the two the typical
response is, “I know it when I see it.” By considering acting as having varying levels based on
complexity and not competency, the scope of what is included under this consideration is greatly
widened. Despite the denial of the museums, their endeavors would readily fall within this
continuum.

In his article “On Acting and Not-Acting,” Kirby outlines five basic steps that a person
may follow to change an action from being perceived as not-acting to acting: non-matrixed
performing, non-matrixed representation, “received” acting, simple acting, and complex acting.
What differentiates each of these steps is the complexity of the context surrounding the action
and the relationship to the observer.

Non-acting is defined as: “where the performer does nothing to feign, simulate,
impersonate and so forth” (Kirby, “On Acting” 3). Non-matrixed performing is concerned with
“those performers who do not do anything to reinforce the information or identification” (4). In
this instance, the perception that he is “acting” is applied to the person defined by place or
costume, some external consideration. Kirby uses stage hands in a Noh performance as an
example stating: “[he] is merely himself and is not imbedded, as it were, in matrices of pretended
or represented character, situation, place, and time (4). The non-matrixed representation takes
this idea one step further. The matrices, or connections, that the audience makes in relation to the action of the person they are observing, places upon that person an interpretation or meaning associated with that action, “referential elements are applied to the performer and are not acted by him” (5). If the performance is called *Oedipus* and a man walks across the stage with a limp, regardless of his clothing or any other indicator on stage of Greece, the audience will associate this action with the character of Oedipus and assume the man is this character. The man has done nothing more than walked with a limp, no other matrices existed, yet a connection is made through the representation implied. As these matrices become more explicit and the connections the audience makes become clearer, a high degree of acting occurs. Performers under this category would be walk-ons, or extras who do nothing more that take up space on stage. They are not doing anything that would normally be considered “acting” but they are perceived as actors. Their actions are based in ordinary behavior but their context is within a larger production usually including “true” acting as part of this scale. Kirby calls this “received” acting (6). The transition into a performance that would be more readily recognized as “acting” occurs when:

> the person does something to simulate, represent, impersonate and so forth. . . . It does not matter what style he uses or whether the action is part of a complete characterization or informational presentation. No emotion needs to be involved. The definition can depend solely on the character of what is done. Thus a person who, as in a game of charades, pretends to put on a jacket that does not exist or feigns being ill is acting. Acting can be said to exist in the smallest and simplest action that involves pretense. (6)

In Kirby’s continuum the element that distinguishes “true” acting is the psychic or emotional expression. How that emotion is created and used is not relevant but that it is used takes the action into the realm of acting. “It may be merely the ‘use’ and projection of emotion that distinguishes acting from non-acting” (7).
One of the questions that arise with Kirby’s continuum is the idea of intent. In the first two categories, there is no overt attempt of the person observed to “act.” The person’s intent is to perform an ordinary action that is interpreted by the observer as a form of acting. As the complexity of the matrices increases, it seems more obvious that the person’s intent is that their actions be perceived as a form of acting within the context surrounding that person. It is at this juncture that confusion occurs at the living history sites. If the interpreter declares that he or she is not acting but the audience perceives them as acting, who is correct? I argue that, using Kirby’s continuum and his qualifications for the differing steps, that the audience is justified in their assessment. It is their perception that defines what is acting, not the intent of the “actor.” The intent of the actor is irrelevant in the assessment. Based on this idea that there are degrees of acting, it is easy to justify many actions that on the surface would not at first glance be called acting but in fact could readily qualify as a kind of acting. Though most interpreters at living history museums cringe at the thought of being called actors, using this continuum as a positioning for the definition of acting, not only is it justifiable to call them actors but to include them within the realm of the “true” actor. These same definitions apply to the TV productions, especially the Colonial House where the participants are required to assume “roles” and perform the lives of specific colonial persons.

Performance Reconstruction as Historic Analysis

Freddie Rokem, in his book Performing History, examined various performances based on historical events such as Ariane Mnouchknie’s 1789, Robert Wilson’s Danton’s Death, Peter Brook’s Marat/Sade, and Gedalia Besser’s Ghetto. He examined the reaction of various audiences to re-enacted historical events where the audience may have little understanding or connection to those events. Rokem also focused on the educational possibilities of performing history and the role of the performer and spectator toward educational ends. He quoted the
playwright Anton Büchner who believed that a dramatist was actually akin to an historian saying:

The dramatist is in my view nothing other than a historian, but is superior to the latter in that he re-creates history: instead of offering us a bare narrative, he transports us directly into the life of an age, he gives us characters instead of character portrayals; full-bodied figures instead of mere descriptions. (Rokem 135)

Through the re-enactment of an historical period, performers and spectators can gain insight and understanding into the period. Büchner and Rokem are referring to stage performances of history in their discussions but the same can be said of the living history museums.

Can the past be truly captured in performance? Michael Kirby states:

Here we will say that we do not believe that a performance can be completely re-created because we consider it to exist, ultimately, in the experience of the spectator, the historical context, the moment in time, parts of the experience that cannot be recaptured. This does not mean that reconstruction is futile nor that it is not tremendously important. . . .The reconstructed performance is not (only) an artifact but a work of art that is the potential source for complicated (and sophisticated) experience. (Kirby, “Reconstruction” 2)

For much the same reasons, the living museums, archeological experiments, outdoor historical dramas, and the PBS productions are doomed to fail as historical reconstructions. This is especially true for the PBS shows where it is impossible to eliminate from the equation the often expressed sense of deprivation among the participants. Just as it is impossible for a modern acting company to recreate a period audience with all the perceptions, prejudices and sociological baggage associated with that time, modern participants attempting to relive history maintain the knowledge of different conditions in comparison to the historical conditions they must endure. The modern participants know that the lived experience is temporary and devoid of
the true dangers that come with the uncertainties of the future. This phenomenon is further explored during the discussion of the TV programs in chapter four.

The value of these performances, however, goes beyond merely attempting to capture a moment in time. Kirby approached this activity not as an artifact but as another work of art: “it is as a theatrical experience, not as an academic exercise, that we are presenting it” (2). He also validates its scholarly importance:

Because reconstruction, theoretically, is guided by standards other than contemporary taste, it offers us the possibility of something unexpected, surprising and radically different. When this happens, when looking toward the past creates a new view of the future, reconstruction fulfills the goals of the avant-garde. (2)

When these historical performances are viewed as artifacts themselves, their significance takes on layered meanings, and the past merges with the present.

Precise Nature and Scope of this Study

This analysis of the development of a synthesis of history and production is conducted through case studies of two living history museums, one outdoor historical drama, three experimental archeological sites, and two PBS productions. I have limited the selection of case studies to those relating to history and representation within the United States. The two living history museums are Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation1. I have chosen these two sites because they are the most famous and among the oldest, and have more self generated and extended documentation than most other sites.

1The reconstructed site of the original settlement at Plymouth Plantation uses this older form of the word. In referencing the modern site I will use this spelling. When referencing the original settlement, I will use the more conventional spelling.
Colonial Williamsburg was created as a recreation of eighteenth-century Williamsburg Virginia to be a tourist attraction whereby visitors would enjoy and learn about historical buildings and the activities of people who lived during that time. The reconstruction began in 1925, and the site officially opened in 1932. The interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg are employees who enact history as a day job. Plimoth Plantation was incorporated on October 2, 1947 with the intent to recreate as closely as possible the original pilgrim settlement in America.

There are subtle differences between the two sites. The main Plimoth Plantation complex is located away from the modern city of Plymouth with the recreated site set off at a distant from the modern buildings. Colonial Williamsburg is situated as part of a large commercial tourist complex. There is more of a sense of remoteness at Plimoth Plantation allowing visitors a better opportunity to “lose themselves in the moment.” Though the interpreters at Plimoth Plantation are also employees representing people from the original colony, some of the interpreters live on site for extended periods of time.

Both of these sites reflect the idea that the visitor is taking a journey back into the past to physically experience and talk to people from another time. Their expectations for visitors perhaps is summed up in the advertisements for Sauder Village, a recreated nineteenth-century village in Archibald Ohio, which state “There’s no time like the present to have fun in the past” (Sauder).

The outdoor historical drama is included in this study as representative of the type of historian that Büchner is referring to. It is also an example of acknowledged “professional” actors performing history in contrast to the performers at the living history museums and in the PBS productions. The one I am focusing on in this study is Trumpet in the Land. It is an historical enactment of a local event near New Philadelphia, Ohio. It differs from the living museums on several levels but claims to be transporting its audience back to the past just as claimed by many of the living history museums. I will be exploring the dynamics inherent in this production, the audience appeal, and how it engages the history it is attempting to recreate.
The Pamunkey Project in West Virginia, Buckskinners, and Washburn – Norlands Living History Center in Maine are the three case studies used to exemplify experimental archeological. The experimental archeological sites differ from the living history museums in terms of the relationship of the participants and their goals. Volunteers typically live separated from the modern world for periods of time. The Pamunkey Project sought to recreate life in a Native American stone-age, while Washburn-Norlands Living History Center offers weekends for those who would like to experience New England life in 1870s. Though Washburn-Norlands is generally open to the public, during the immersion weekends, it is closed to the general public. Many participants of experimental archaeology have documented their experiences, as have the founders of these projects. The third kind of experimental archaeology focuses on the Buckskinners. Though they are not site specific, they do readily fall under this category. The Buckskinners seek to experience the life of eighteenth to nineteenth-century frontier fur trappers. They take great pride in achieving as authentic a representation as possible. Though through most of the year they are twenty-first century citizens, they come together at Rendezvous to live like early frontiersmen and share their knowledge.

The purpose of these experiments is not only to attempt to access history but also to discover if modern man can cope with the conditions of earlier times without all the modern amenities that are usually taken for granted. These programs are as much an experiment in sociology as in history. Due to the limitation of this study, I will not be exploring the sociological aspect of this research.

The two PBS productions are *Frontier House* and *Colonial House*. They represent the combined methodologies and philosophies of all three of the former forays into historical recreation. *Colonial House* has the added complexity in that it was co-produced by Plimoth Plantation, thereby supplying Wall-to-Wall Productions, producers of the earlier *Frontier House*, with extensive research. The purpose of these two productions was not only for modern families to experience history but to supply the material for television shows based on their experiences. These productions also reflect the rise of “reality” television in the 1990s. They could be
categorized as PBS’s version of reality TV. Their obvious connection with the archeological experiments lies in the roles the families play as they experience these different time periods separated from the modern world, except for the occasional visits by camera crews. Aspects of living history museums are represented through the television audience as “visitors.” The participating families then take on the roles played by interpreters at living history sites. What is missing is the direct contact and dialogue between visitors and interpreters that exists in the living history museums. The inherent theatricality of these productions reflects that of the outdoor historical theatres though the producers would be loath to admit the connection. The productions also take on the qualities of a reality TV that attempts to capture a sense of reality by showing the audience cinema verité moments in the “day in the life of” these people. This connection with the constructs inherent in reality TV is explored later in relationship to the PBS production.

Through the exploration of this influential interconnectedness of “living history” manifestations, I have explicated the role of performance techniques used in achieving the various levels of recreated history. The use of these techniques tends to be problematic for the “producers” in that they prefer to consider their work within the context of historical research and narrative rather than merely another theatricalization of the past. This resistance to being associated with theatre (regardless of the obvious use of theatrical techniques in creating a production) is discussed in the conclusion. Though related to this development, I do not explore the ethnological aspects of the discourse. Issues of reconstructing history and reinterpreting it, performing history, presenting history to the general public, and popularizing history readily relating to this study are touched upon to some extant. I also acknowledge that all these issues are related to one another and are reflected in my case studies. I raise these for further analysis and do not attempt to solve them. Such analyses deserve their own studies, but as yet few attempts to address these issues in relationship to one another.
Literature Review

Most of the literature that informs this research pertains to separate sections of the study. There are a few works that concern the study as a whole. Jay Anderson has done extensive research into the history of living history museums and their impact on historical narrative. Three of his works specifically address various issues that concern my research: *Time Machines*, *The Living History Reader*, and *Living History Sourcebook*. These are useful in understanding the historical context and development of living history museums.

Anderson’s work is comprehensive concerning the rise of museums and the problems associated with making sense of artifacts and events for the visiting public. He examines the various types of experiments from reconstructed villages to the re-enactment of specific events such as battles of the Civil War. All of these experiments have the two part goal of being entertaining and educational not only for those observing, but for those involved as well. His work addresses the dynamics that take museums to high performance levels that I argue have been influential in the creation of the PBS productions.

Scott Magelssen has written several articles that examine performance relationships at living history museums such as “Stepping Back in Time: the Construction of Different Temporal Spaces at Living History Museums in the Untied States,” and “Recreation and Re-Creation.” Both of these articles were written in 2004 and reflect a burgeoning interest in the performativity of these sites complimenting this study.

David Lowenthal’s studies of Americans’ relationship with the past explicate the motivations behind the desire to create reconstructed sites like Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation. *Our Past Before Us: Why Do We Save It?*, a collection essays that he edited with Marcus Binney, focuses on reasons why we save the past. These essays were initially part of a symposium that Lowenthal and Binney organized in 1979 in London that addressed several concerns:

- Why does it matter to preserve buildings, artifacts and landscapes from previous epochs?
What does our tangible heritage signify to us as individuals, as communities, and as nations?

How can we make best use of what we succeed in keeping from the tooth of time?

How can we avoid debasing such relics in the process of suiting them to our aims? (Lowenthal, Our Past 9)

Many of these same concerns have been raised by those developing the reconstructed sites. Lowenthal and Binney felt that it was necessary to address these issues since very little in critical analysis existed stating why preservation has become so popular an activity. Lowenthal notes that “though several books narrate the progress of preservation . . . no general history of the subject has appeared” (10).

General histories about living history museums are scarce. There have been several articles and books discussing the broader aspects of reconstructed sites, sometimes focusing on one site as exemplary. “How-to” books on performing history, such as William Anderson and Shirley Payne Low’s Interpretation of Historic Sites and Freeman Tilden’s Interpreting Our Heritage, discuss ways of approaching the performative aspects of these sites beyond mere demonstration. The performances that occur at these sites tend to be referred to as “interpreting.” No mention of acting techniques is apparent in either work when considering the training of interpreters. This may reflect the antitheatrical attitude toward this type of performance as found in Colonial Williamsburg’s writings that insist: “character interpreters are not actors” (Handler, New History 75).

Another source for information about historical reconstruction sites is the recently organized ALHFAM website, the Association for Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums. Though its primary focus is on living historical farms, the association is a source for the “exchange and sharing of ideas, information, tools and experiences centered around accurate, active participatory, object-based historical interpretations” (ALHFAM). This organization has published several articles that are used in this study.
There are several publications by the people directly involved with the reconstructed villages of Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation which include mission statements and developmental documentation. In terms of first hand information, William Goodwin, founder of Colonial Williamsburg, published several works about this project including *A Brief and True Report for the Traveler Concerning Williamsburg in Virginia* in 1932. It was published in conjunction with the opening of the first building and extolled the virtues of this incredible reconstruction project. The popularity of Colonial Williamsburg has led to several publications over the years, primarily published by Colonial Williamsburg Incorporated. In 1951, the project was substantively completed, and there was a surge in publications by the foundation. Among these are *Colonial Williamsburg: The First Twenty-five Years*, a report by the president of the Williamsburg Foundation (1951); *The City That Turned Back Time: Colonial Williamsburg’s First Twenty-five Years* (1952) by Parke Rouse; *America’s Williamsburg* (1954) by Gerald Bath; and *The New Commonwealth of the Intellect* by Kenneth Chorley, Foundation president (1958).

With the rise of social history in the 1960s and 1970s, Colonial Williamsburg came under attack as an “elitist” depiction of early America, especially in its depiction of slavery. This criticism brought about a significant change in the look and interpretation that continues to be addressed today. This ongoing discussion is reflected in a variety of articles: “On the Uses of Relativism: Fact, Conjecture, and Black and White Histories at Colonial Williamsburg” by Eric Gable, Richard Handler and Anna Lawson, “Historic Site Interpretation: The Human Approach” by Shirley Low, “Is It *Real* History Yet?: An Update On Living History Museums” by Kate F Stover, and “Humanizing the Past: The Revitalization of the History Museum” by David G. Vanderstel. Colonial Williamsburg has celebrated its 75th anniversary. More recent publications, such as *Creating Colonial Williamsburg* (2002) by Anders Greenspan, discuss the history and continuing development of this project to create as accurate as possible a picture of Colonial Williamsburg from the eighteenth century.

One publication stands out as significant in its discussion of the performative aspects of Colonial Williamsburg: Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum.*
They studied the methods used to translate “messages” in an analysis of the various methods of communication that occurs there. They observed the training of interpreters and how the interpreters translated that training into their presentations and discussions with the visitors. Their study revealed that the different stages that the “messages” pass through from the Board or committees that established the “message,” to the instructors, to the interpreters, to how they are received by the visitors creates a complicated performance construction. At no time are the interpreters told what to say; only the information they are to relate. As the approach to historical authenticity changed with the rise of social historicism, so, too, did the “messages” about early America that the foundation wished visitors to understand.

These works that highlight various moments in Colonial Williamsburg’s history allow me to trace the changes in the philosophy behind the quest for historical accuracy and the changes in subsequent performances. Other sources, such as articles from historians and ethnologists, discuss these sites from a variety of points of views. Along with the written literature is information on web sites that supplement the research. The information about Colonial Williamsburg combines what the foundation says about itself and how it wishes to be perceived, and what others have to say about it.

Much of my research concerning Plimoth Plantation is enhanced by what I gathered at my visit to the site. There are several published works that supplement this information. One source, which not only discusses aspects of the reconstruction but also delves into the performative qualities of the experience, is *Performing the Pilgrims* by Stephen Snow. Snow explores the ethnohistorical role-playing at Plimoth Plantation. To this end, he discusses theories of performance-audience interactions, actor/historians, presentational styles, and ideas of performing culture.

The discourse on outdoor historical dramas is scarce and primarily located within the archives of the Institute of Outdoor Drama at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Their information will aid in positioning the role of outdoor historical dramas in the larger scheme of performing history. The drama discussed, *Trumpet in the Land*, has extensive
websites with useful information. In terms of the manifestations of history on stage, Jeffrey Mason’s book *Melodrama and the Myth of America* describes the transition in perception of the historical plays of the nineteenth century from history to myth through melodramatic constructs which incorporates dynamics associated with nostalgia. These perceptions will affect the approach to history by the playwrights of outdoor historical dramas.

The experimental archeological sites are somewhat more difficult to address in terms of published documentation. To this end, John Cole’s book, *Experimental Archeology*, and Errett Callahan’s *Experimental Archeological Papers* are valuable resources. Their discussions include general information as well as commentary on specific sites. Of the three forms of experimental archeology I focus on, the Pamunkey Project, the Buckskinners, and the Washburn-Norlands Living History Center, information on Pamunkey is the most elusive based mostly on Callahan’s writings who was the lead professor on the project. Though the Project is no longer active, Anderson discusses its history and includes reflections from his students who participated in the project. Anderson also discusses the history of the Buckskinners and the various associations in the United States. There are also many websites dedicated to this lifestyle including the White Oak Society. This society has extensive information about all levels of Buckskinning.

Washburn-Norlands’ website is very informative about this experience. The Washburn-Norlands Center is open on a daily basis to the public throughout the year, and in the Spring and Summer it offers live-in weekends. Many of the participants have written about their live-in weekends, especially those historians and reporters that wished to find out for themselves if Norlands was as “historical” as advertised. Most were pleasantly surprised by the intensity of the experience and the feeling of being transported to another time. Their writings express the rewards that these sites offer as historically educational and entertaining adventures.

A discussion of the influence of these three approaches to living history in the form of two PBS productions is found in chapter four. The *Colonial House* and the *Frontier House* filmed the experience of several families attempting to “live” in a different time period. The primary source of information about these experiences comes from videos of these productions.
and is supplemented by their respective companion books. Beyond the companion books, there have been several interviews with the families on television and in magazines. Reviews of the productions also give some insight into the problems of these attempts at living history.

As part of the discussion about the PBS productions, I explore their relationship to reality TV. The use of the reality TV format to narrate an event is an integral part of the construction of these productions, and is important concerning the performative techniques utilized. There has been a great deal of scholarship about reality TV constructs. These include the work of Annette Hill with her book \textit{Reality TV, Staging the Real} by Richard Kilborn, \textit{Reality TV} by Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, and James Roman’s \textit{From Daytime to Primetime}. Within the discussion of reality TV is an important component of the PBS productions: the video diary. There have been several articles focusing on video diaries including Sue Dinsmore’s “Strategies for Self Scrutiny” and “Video Diaries” by Peter Keighron. I briefly discuss the history of documentary as the progenitor of presenting the real on television. To this end I use the works of Bill Nichol with his book \textit{Representing Reality}, and his various articles; and Michael Renov’s articles “Toward a Poetics of Documentary” and “The Truth about Non-Fiction.”

Since the goal of the museums’ archeological experiments and productions is to gain a clearer understanding of the past, it is necessary to understand the basic construction of historical narrative. A common concern with this construction is the impact that nostalgia can have. A nostalgic view of history, though popular, may have little to do with empirical evidence. This dynamic plays a large part in the attitude of the volunteers in the PBS productions. To understand the significance of nostalgia, I am framing my analysis with the works of Susan Bennet, and Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase. The works of Eric Hobsbawm, R. G. Collingwood, and Michel de Certeau inform my discussion concerning the idea of writing history.

Susan Bennet’s book, \textit{Performing Nostalgia}, plays a dual role in my analysis by engaging issues of performance constructs of history and the role of nostalgia in those constructs. She also addresses the issues of the necessity for historical accuracy for the success of those
performances. Her definition of nostalgia will be the basis for differentiating what constitutes history and what does not.

Nostalgia is constituted as a longing for certain qualities and attributes in lived experience that we have apparently lost, at the same time as it indicates our inability to produce parallel qualities and attributes which would satisfy the particularities of lived experience in the present. (5)

Shaw and Chase further explicate the notion of nostalgia through sister notions of utopia and tradition. They believe, “Tradition is the enactment and dramatization of continuity; it is the thread which binds our separate lives to the broad canvas of history” (11).

My approach to history, on the other hand, is exemplified in Hobsbawm’s book, On History, and Collingwood’s The Idea of History. These works discuss the rise of modern historical analysis as established by Leopold von Ranke in the early nineteenth century and how that system has been affected by social history. De Certeau takes that analysis one step further by addressing the need to understand the role of narrative, acknowledging that history is a construct that may defy scientific analysis as proposed by von Ranke. Though many of the sites I am discussing began prior to the advent of social history, the changes in the performances there reflect some of the changes in the construction of historical narrative resulting from social history. Though echoes of nineteenth-century historical analysis can be recognized in the PBS productions, they also tend to be products of social history infused with nostalgic overtones.

Another of David Lowenthal’s book, The Past is a Foreign Country, plays a part in the understanding of our relationship with history. In this work, he discusses various attitudes toward the past including nostalgia, tradition, and invention. These attitudes can be readily seen in the development of the case-studies examined in this study.
Organization

This study focuses on the analysis and comparison of these different forms of “living history,” and the performativity inherent in their presentations. It is divided into six parts: history and the museum, outdoor historical dramas, living history museums, archeological experiments, history and television, and conclusion. The first part, history and museum, focuses on the development of museums from the collectors of artifacts to site reconstruction. The next four sections each focus on the specific case-studies as previously mentioned, their history, and their development as performing history venues. The conclusion ties these various approaches to history together explicating the new insights and understandings that this study seeks to achieve.
CHAPTER I
LIVING HISTORY

The Idea of History

The idea of history is a complex and varied. How history has been perceived, recorded, and utilized by differing societies typically reflects the value that the past has for those societies. Peter Stone, in The Presented Past, believes that in western civilization,

There is a confluence of four approaches to the interpretation and presentation of the past: academic or theoretical archaeology; indigenous views of the past; school history; and the past as presented to the general public in museums and ‘historic sites.’ All four approaches have their own priorities and agendas but, although they frequently draw on different sets of data, they have as their common thread the interpretation of past human activity. (1)

It is the idea of the confluence of these four approaches that constitutes the basis of this study.

Humanity’s interest in history can be traced back to the basic human desire to tell stories or to share events that have happened. To many ancient societies, the tales of legendary heroes and gods were considered to be as much a part of history as any first-hand account or verifiable fact. The earliest written accounts that modern scholars recognize as attempts at recording authentic history, have come to us from the Greeks through the writings of Herodotus and Thucydides.

It was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that scholars began approaching historical writing based on eyewitness accounts and primary documentation as essential to creating an historic narrative. Barthold Niebuhr and Leopold von Ranke, two of the most prominent historians of the early nineteenth century, were instrumental in the foundation of modern historiography based in the critical analysis of sources. Niebuhr’s focus was on a
reconstruction of Roman history, questioning the credibility of Greek and Roman historians. He
stressed the necessity of examining original source material to ascertain where historical fact
could be separated from fiction and mythology. An historian of the succeeding generation was
von Ranke who modeled much of his approach to historical research on Niebuhr’s work.
William Gooch, in *History and Historians*, summarizes von Ranke’s contribution as significant
on three fronts. The first is to create a narrative based on the facts of the past and not on the
passions and prejudices of the present. The second is to utilize only contemporary sources as the
basis for these narratives. The third is the imperative that historians should carefully analyze the
authorities, “contemporary or otherwise, in the light of the author’s temperament, affiliations and
opportunity of knowledge and by comparison with the testimony of other writers” (97). This
approach to history would be a defining aspect of what some have termed Modernism. To
differentiate this concept from its referential to art, I will utilize the term philosophical
modernism and focus on the philosophical ramifications of the changes in thought of the
eighteenth century.

The advent of philosophical modernism is generally associated with the rise of a
movement that many historians refer to as the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. The
belief of these philosophers was that “human perfectibility could be attained through rationality”
(Gabardi 3). Though the Enlightenment usually is limited to the eighteenth century after which
in the nineteenth century it was superseded by Romanticism, naturalism, realism, and a plethora
of other “isms,” the basic philosophical approach to understanding based in reason continued to
influence historical scholarship into the twentieth century as the accepted methodology of
historical research. Many sociologists argue that for all practical purposes philosophical
modernism ended in the 1960s and was replaced with Postmodernism. Many philosophers
resistant to the declaration of a new era labeled “postmodern” are “hopeful that the consequences
of modernization can be corrected and believe that the Enlightenment project should be
defended” (Gabardi 3). Whether or not one believes that we have entered a new era categorized
as Postmodernism, much of our perceptions or approaches to understanding and accessing history are grounded in Modernist constructs.

One of the most significant aspects of much of modernist historiography is a perceived separation of the past from the present. The past is dead and gone therefore it can be looked at, dissected, analyzed, evaluated, and ultimately judged. Michel de Certeau states that historiography attempts to establish “a past” divorced from the present.

In their respective turns, each “new” time provides the place for a discourse considering whatever preceded it to be “dead,” but welcoming a “past” that had already been specified by former ruptures. (4)

This detachment from the past ultimately lead to the past being what David Lowenthal refers to as “a foreign country whose features are shaped by today’s predilections, its strangeness domesticated by our own preservation of its vestiges” (Past xvii). He argues that we have gained an appreciation of the past as a relic to be saved, but have lost the ability for its creative use stating, once “antiquity was exemplary, beneficial, and beautiful” (xvi). It was made relevant to everyday life by being infused in the present as a part of improving oneself. According to Lowenthal, the past becomes a time separate and apart from the now, lending itself to flights of fancy by those not necessarily interested in historical accuracy but rather in search of a golden time to be identified and emulated. This view can lead to a nostalgic version of the past where reality, based in historical accuracy, is replaced with partial truths and distorted interpretations that create a time that never was but better than today, in comparison. For some who visit living museums and for many of those who volunteered to be part of the PBS productions such as Colonial House and Frontier House, their perception of history is little more than a nostalgic construction of the past. Since the outdoor historical dramas do not seek to recreate the past on stage but the essence of that past, they have been criticized as being a more nostalgic picture of the past than of what really happened. This attitude further supports the antitheatrical sentiments that many historians have toward theatre.
That “history” can readily slip into nostalgic constructs exemplifies a major problem with the idea of history as a science or even a discipline, let alone that history can be accessed. Mordecai Roshwald in his article “Perceptions of History” believes that:

History is hardly a discipline, let alone a science. History covers the flood of events and considers their possible causal antecedents, but it fails to bring order and comprehension to this deluge. It is merely a delineation and a delimitation of a domain, but in no way the rest of it. We can define the events of the past as historical, but this is merely an act of classification, not of comprehension. (44)

Even if this pessimistic view of history is to be accepted, it does not stop us from seeking truths in the past with the hope of giving us meaning and understanding of the world we live in. As society became more complicated with the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the pre-industrial world became more remote, ways to escape the turmoil of everyday life were developed including through a renewed interest in how life used to be. It was at this time that bits and pieces of the past became housed in public museums.

Museum Collections to “Living” Museums

As von Ranke was developing his theories of historiography, ways for the public to experience history were being developed in the form of museums. These museums initially collected oddities in a fairly haphazard fashion more for the public’s amusement than edification. In his book Introduction to Museum Work, Ellis Burcaw defines a museum as an “institution existing to collect objects, maintain permanent collections, and base its educational work on these collections” (18). The word museum comes from the Greek Mouseion meaning “a place of contemplation, a philosophical institute, a temple of the muses” (26). Even though the ancient Greeks had such institutes they were not at all like the institutions we would recognize today as a “museum.” In terms of collecting oddities from the past, this obsession can be traced throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. It would not be until the seventeenth century that the
first “public” museum would open. Elias Ashmole was an avid collector of “oddities.” His pride in his collection led him to creating the Ashmolean in Oxford in 1683. In 1759, the British government opened the British Museum, the first government sponsored public museum. Though open to the public, a visitor still needed to acquire a ticket. The visitor would apply for a ticket with the Porter for approval by the Principal Librarian. There was no cost but the approved ticket was necessary for admittance. Upon achieving a ticket, the visitor would join four other visitors for the one day excursion. This restrictive attitude, allowing only those visitors worthy enough to view the collection, would lead to the opening of rival museums with less restricted parameters (Burcaw 26).

Throughout the nineteenth century, the organizational policies emerging from the collections would develop into the science of museology. Originally, collections were merely a gathering of oddities. Rarely was there any logical reason associated with the gathering of artifacts or their display. Catherine Andronik positions the place of museums in early nineteenth century America stating:

Museums full of animal specimens or artifacts from other cultures were educational, and therefore permissible. They even served a religious purpose, some claimed, by displaying the wonders of God’s creation, and emphasizing how ‘primitive’ other cultures could be without the civilizing force of Christianity. (Andronik 29)

Enterprising business men therefore took advantage of this attitude and capitalized on the commercial possibilities of museums for the masses. This was a major impetus for the formation of many of these early museums, though some did see themselves as the keepers of history. One of the greatest examples of this dynamic was P. T. Barnum’s American Museum. Barnum purchased Scudder’s American Museum located in New York in 1840. His goal was to create an amusement that would attract the common man not as a one time visitor but who could be enticed to come back repeatedly. This museum had a large array of exhibits. The basement held caged animals and sea life from all over the world, the ground floor had large panoramas of
historic events or foreign sites, the second floor displayed oddities and wax figures of famous people, and the third and forth floors contained attractions that more reflected what we would consider typical museum fare: historic artifacts and collections. For Barnum, this was a money making enterprise.

As the number of museums grew in size and diversity, some chose to focus on specific types of artifacts, others on broad topics such as history or art museums. Curators experimented with a variety of ways to associate artifacts and enhance the educational aspects. The goal became to find ways to understand the artifact in its historic context. This desire would lead to the development of the open-air museums and ultimately the living history museums.

Even though these museums have extensive public popularity, academia still did not readily recognize them as legitimate historical research. This rift in the history community between historians and museologists, later including those who pursued the “living” history approach, can be traced back to the inception of the first public museums. During the twentieth century, some historians such as Arthur Hazelius from Sweden and Peter Reynolds in England came to believe that “living” the history might afford new insights into the past. This belief led to the rise of living history museums. It has only been recently in the advancing changes of the public museum that historians have begun to value the significance of the research possibilities that first hand simulations can afford them. This has been achieved through the merging of performance and history in the attempt to bring history alive to the general public. This legitimizing of the living history museum within the scholarly historic community is long overdue but is not without contention.

The earliest prototype for future open-air museums, freilichtmuseen in Swedish, is usually credited to Artur Hazelius, who founded his museum called Skansen in Sweden which opened on October 11, 1891. His goal was to create a cultural center for Sweden. Prior to the creation of Skansen, Hazelius had been making life sized dioramas for his indoor museum of Scandinavian folklore in Stockholm which he opened in 1873. His use of dioramas was based in the belief that artifacts should be displayed within their historic context. For example, if the
artifacts were cooking implements, a reconstruction of the “kitchen” should be created placing the implements therein instead of displaying them in a glass case. (Anderson *Time*, 19) At first glance, this description sounds very similar to what Henry Ford would create in Dearborn Michigan with Greenfield Village. Ford collected “structures and artifacts” from across the United States including Edison’s Menlo Park, the Wright brother’s bicycle shop, and a seventeenth-century English cottage. Although the individual displays at Greenfield Village preserved historical structures, the collection as a whole has no geographic or historical consistency.

Skansen, however, was more than just a collection of buildings and artifacts place within a reconstruction historical context. Hazelius believed that without activity his museum would be as dead and static as other history museums. Along with collecting buildings he sought out various groups of people to bring his museum alive.

Hazelius brought in musicians to play their fiddles, Lapps to herd reindeer, Dalecarlian peasants to live in their mountain chalets. Old popular customs were revived: girls with candles in their hair sang on St. Lucia’s Day, and museum staff and visitors alike danced around the Mora upon May Pole on Midsummer’s Eve. There was folk music and dancing on warm evenings, and handicraft markets and fairs in the winter. Skansen became the first “living museum.” (Anderson *Time*, 19)

Since Hazelius’ opening of Skansen, hundreds of open-air museums have been established throughout Europe. Most of them, though, do not incorporate live performances such as period music or dance, as Hazelius did. Many fear damage to the artifacts, but the primary concern lies in being accused of *folklorismos* or what some scholars call “fakelore.” Many European folklorists and historians believe that the live activities incorporated into these museums may be entertaining, but are merely popularized versions of the past that are being passed off as the real thing.
Many Americans became acquainted with Hazeliu’s work when he sent six of his early dioramas from the Museum of Scandinavian Folklore to the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876. Unable to send live performers along with these dioramas, they nevertheless represented snapshots of his work. Fortunately, in America the concern about *folklorismos* was not as pervasive. Almost immediately the idea of bringing history alive through the combination of the preservation of buildings and artifacts and the use of interpreters living in the buildings or using artifacts began to take hold. One major group that felt it part of their duty to preserve early American Heritage was the Daughters of the American Revolution, the DAR. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the organization began to purchase homes and other significant historical buildings throughout the United States, restore them, and open them to the public. The restored buildings were staffed with personnel who were informed on the subject at hand and dressed in period style. The DAR was doing on a small-scale what the founders of Colonial Williamsburg would do later on a much larger scale.

During the twentieth century, living history museums have sprung up throughout the United States. These museums are distinguishable from their European counterparts in that most European museums termed “open air” do not have a “living” aspect to them. Another distinguishing feature is that in United States these museums tend to focus on a specific period in time whereas in Europe many tend to focus on developing trends over a long span of time. Currently, in the United States most living history museums fall under the ubiquitous category of heritage preservation. This new categorization has been prompted by the change in focus whereby “the original purpose of having a museum, i.e. to preserve and interpret in a scholarly manner a significant number of objects, has been almost entirely displaced by the desire to give the visitor some kind of more or less pleasurable ‘experience’” (Hewison 19).

This categorization becomes problematic when considering establishing a new site and determining an interpretive program. In his article “Heritage: An Interpretation,” Robert Hewison discusses the difficulty in attaining a comprehensive definition of heritage. The examples he sites all seem to fall short, or are so elaborate and all inclusive as to be ineffective.
He finally focuses on the concept of something which is the subject of cultural choice and writes “. . . . as in many matters of cultural choice, that choice is practically demonstrated by the decision to spend money on something, or by trying to get others to spend it for us” (16). The interpretation at any site is created through this same deliberate choice of what aspects of the narrative adequately reflect the “heritage” being preserved. So, that which is included in the interpretation at a site can be as difficult to justify or grasp as the parameters within which such a decision was made.

The concept of attempting to save one’s heritage, especially in light of the difficulty of defining heritage, has readily lent itself to confusing heritage with tradition and leaving the door open for creating a history that is more nostalgia than reality. Hewison believes that in attempting to present the past in the name of heritage we are “gradually effacing history, by substituting our own image of the past for its reality” (21).

This attitude has been the basis for much of the criticism against sites such as Colonial Williamsburg as a presentation of the past that is too sanitized and too perfect. Conversely, the question has been posed: Do we want to preserve the past in absolute authenticity, smells and all? Peter Rumble takes up this issue in his article “Interpreting the Built and Historic Environment” where he poses the challenge:

How to represent inhumanity, the cruelty, the squalor, the filth and stench of some events? In living history presentation these can only be enacted to a limited extent. We can’t kill people on the battlefields; we can’t have dysentery and disease in medieval re-enactments. (29)

Obviously, no reconstruction of the past can be an absolutely authentic representation of the times. Yet sites continue to be established that attempt to access history through representations or recreations of the past. With these limitations in mind, Rumble believes that interpretation programs should “be avenues for a fuller understanding of the people who lived in the past, and of the buildings, towns, or sites which they inhabited” (31).
Social History

In the 1960s and 1970s, a shift began to occur in approaches to academic historical research that resulted in an emphasis on social history. An emerging interest in the everyday lives of ordinary people led to what was termed history from the “bottom up” approach. This type of history seeks to give equal representation of everyday lives with those of the famous and well known. Thus historical sites are considered significant on their own merits regardless of whether or not George Washington slept there (Carson 27). The living history museums were to benefit most from emphasis on social history. The new crop of academic historians believed these sites afforded them the ability to do the kind of research they wished to do. Unlike traditional archeology, this form of “hands on” research focuses on attempts to understand the artifact through its usefulness within a sociological context and not just as an historic oddity.

Cary Carson in his article “Living Museums of Everyman’s History” summarizes the early idealistic belief that social history would revolutionize the historian’s ability to achieve truth and authenticity in constructing historical narratives. He states:

We were attracted to its egalitarianism and to its “scientific” dedication to finding out how past societies were structured and how their parts worked together to form organic communities. At heart, I supposed, there was an even more basic appeal. To a generation of political activists and sidewalk superintendents, here was history written that played down the importance of studying the past for its own sake and playing up the notion that all history was a laboratory where historians with social-scientific bents could discover long-term changes in patterns of human behavior. We prided ourselves on being too professional to misrepresent the past for the purpose of promoting social change. Yet we were confident, in an unspecific sort of way, that the new social historians’ penetrating insights would eventually raise the consciousness of our students and of the readers of the books and articles we would soon be writing. (25)
The irony here is that like modernists historians such as Gibbon, MacCauley, etc., who believed the past offered models for improving the present, so too did this group. This idealism was soon recognized for the fiction it was. The living museum experiments elicited a populist spirit. The idea that “living” history sites would revolutionize historiography and scholarship was soon replaced with the reality that the popularity of the sites served as re-enactments of everyday life for the visiting, highly interested public. Living museums did not “spark a proletarian uprising, but they and other ‘living history museums,’ as they call themselves, have recently begun advancing ideas about the past that have serious -- and deliberate -- implications for the present and future” (Carson 26). Carson says there are three attributes associated with social history: first, all human behavior (the thoughts, actions, and conditions of all peoples from all cultures) falls within its purview; second, a demographic history; and third, collective consciousness.

The most elusive aspect of addressing social history is the ability to tap into the collective consciousness of the historic period being represented. Carson defines the collective consciousness as going beyond the mere representation or retelling of history. The goal of the re-enactment should not only make the visitor witness an activity from the past but also to encourage that visitor to consider the larger sociological conditions of which that the activity is a part. Carson believes that if this is not achieved then “the museum that demonstrates these activities has merely polished up old-fashioned pots-and-hands history and nothing more” (28).

Many social historians found themselves denied access to mainstream academia due to what was perceived as an unorthodox form of historiography. These historians recognized the burgeoning opportunities, though, that could be found at the living museums which in actuality gave them a better ability to pursue social history (Krugler 353). Eventually, this shift in what constitutes legitimate historical scholarship would enable the walls between academia and museums to begin to crumble. In its 1986 report, the Park Service asserted that these methodological advantages associated with social history utilizing interpreters improved the Service’s ability to interpret history. The report stated that “visitors to historic sites have gained
a sense of presence and immediacy with past events that has often stimulated the most latent interest in history” (John Jameson 36).

Performing History

Living history museums refer to their representation of history as interpretation. These sites hire and train personnel to present the historic narrative of the site either in first or third person discussions. The idea of interpretation is not limited to the person discussing history with visitors but includes guide books, the locations of support structures such as visitor centers and car parks, and other forms of descriptors such as exhibition panels and audio-visual displays. William Alderson, *Interpretation of Historic Sites*, quotes the American Association of Museums’ definition of interpretation: “a planned effort to create for the visitor an understanding of the history and significance of events, people, and objects with which the site is associated” (3). Alternatively, Freeman Tildon in his *Interpretation of Our Heritage* states it is “an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects by firsthand experience and by illustrative media” (8). Both definitions focus on the idea that understanding, or meaning, is somehow communicated through demonstration or use of historical artifacts or recreations. In the case of living museums, the understanding pertains to the historic significance of the site itself and/or the buildings, artifacts, etc. there collected.

The interesting omission from these definitions is the role of performance in presenting interpretations. Most discussions of interpretation focus on the relationship between the history and the interpretation. The criticism is divided as to what constitutes good or bad interpretation, or even the way a site interprets the history. Rarely does anyone delve into performance techniques, except for making the distinction between first and third person interpretation with the substitution of “I” for “they” when discussing events. The primary focus is still on the kind and extent of the information shared in terms of authenticity and accuracy. Though Tildon acknowledges that “interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials
presented are scientific, historical or architectural” (26), he clearly differentiates this activity from “drama” hoping that his description will not be misconstrued to mean that the interpreter should be any sort of practicing artist: that he should read poems, give a dramatic performance, deliver an oration, become a tragic or comic thespian, or anything as horribly out of place as these. (28)

This downplaying of the essential performative aspect of interpreters may be indicative of the negative bias toward theatre that has existed for over a thousand years. By focusing on the notion that knowledge and understanding are imparted through interpersonal communication, curators are able to distance themselves from being seen as mere dramatizations that may, in their eyes, undermine the legitimacy that they seek as custodians of heritage. I argue that this stand may actually weaken their attempts to present “real” history by not recognizing the advantages of seeking trained performers to better “tell the story.” Their own language in describing good interpreting shows that curators rely on descriptors that reflect the quality of the “performance” by the interpreters. Tildon and Alderson describe philosophies and methods of training interpreters that illustrate this seeming contradiction.

Tilden’s book is one of the first to address the concept of historical interpretation commonly used in historical sites like the national parks or Colonial Williamsburg. He lists six principles that he found consistent throughout the varied sites.

• Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
• Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
• Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
• The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
• Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.

• Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach, to be at its best it will require a separate program. (26)

These six principles are still the point of reference that most sites use when establishing a comprehensive interpretation program.

Tilden’s approach to interpretation has expanded over the decades. Now planning an interpretation program includes “[knowing] who the visitors are, their interests and knowledge, and encouraging interpretive techniques appropriate to the audience, situation and interpretive subject matter” (Uzzell 12). In a review of the Park Service’s interpretive programs in 1965, a statement about the consideration of the “visitor” was made that would alter the relationship of the interpreter to the visitor:

The term “visitor” represents in effect an illusion. There is no typical visitor. He is everything from a casual passerby to an avid buff, a scholarly historian, a professional military man, or a devoted antiquarian. He is all ages, from cradle-borne to escorted senility. His range of “experience” during a visit may be anything from indifference or boredom to mild curiosity, and on to a craving for even obscure detail of the story associated with the area. Any program may exceed the desires of the least interested; no program can satisfy the insatiable want of a small minority. But interpretive development need not pander to the former, nor seem impoverished to the latter. It is necessary to shape a program that strikes a middle course between the extremes. The questions of judgment and decision come into play and have to be resolved in a way that will result in an overall development which will appeal to, and be comprehensible by, the indifferent and poorly informed, as well as instructive and stimulated to the eager and more learned. The more capable will be introduced to avenues of further
information and learning which they can pursue on their own. This is as much as Service responsibility need attempt. (John Jameson 88)

The work of the Parks Service helped other sites to define and focus their own programs toward improving visitor/interpreter relationships. The rise of social history has broadened the subject matter included in historic sites throughout the country, as have the variety of ways performance has been used to explicate their histories.

Conclusion

As with other types of museums, living history museums primarily were considered less than professional in terms of real historic research. This attitude was especially felt in the Park Service where interpretation programs at its historic sites have been evolving since its inception in 1916. In 1936, the Park Service assured the committee on American Planning and Civic Association that the historic sites actually were significant places for research and historic teaching tools:

An historical site is source material for the study of history, just as truly as any written record. . . .There is no more effective way of teaching history to the average American than to take him to the site on which some great historic event has occurred, and there to give him an understanding and feeling of that event through the medium of contact with the site itself, and the story that goes along with it. (John Jameson 24)

Unfortunately, these assertions did little to convince academics of the legitimacy of historical research at living history sites. The Parks Service in 1965 wrote that “in fact, historic sites were incidental if not irrelevant to the research concerns of most academic historians, and the Service’s focus on the ‘average American’ suggested a sub-professional level of presentation” (36). This attitude would not change until the emergence of the social historian.
Most curators of living history sites believe that they play the role of trustees to history and the future. William Alderson and Shirley Low sum up this belief:

Finally, we wish to state our credo that historic sites are a part of the national heritage and that consequently they should be run for the benefit of the public at large. We who work for historic agencies do not own the sites, we are trustees for them. They are ours to restore and manage and interpret because earlier generations saved them for us; so we, in turn, have an obligation to future generations who have an equal claim to that heritage. Our trusteeship places upon us an ethical commitment to accuracy in restoration, truth in interpretation and protection of the next generation. . . . We do not meet that obligation just by saving and restoring a historic site. Only when the essential meaning of the site and of the people and events associated with it is communicated to the visitor can we truly say that we have met our responsibilities. (6)

Though academia pontificates about history and various ways to interpret it, little of this discourse reaches the general public. For the general public in the United States, living history sites have had a great impact on the image of the past especially in terms of being “American.” This can be readily seen in the next chapter about the history of Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation. Lipsitz’s counter-memory approach to historical narrative constructs can be seen as their presentation of early colonial America at both sites has shifted with the times from preservation of elite colonial society, to cold war patriotism, to the incorporation of social historicity.
CHAPTER 2

“HISTORY” ON STAGE

History as Theatre

Introduction

Though one focus of this paper is on the conflict between the use of performance techniques at living history sites and subsequently on the Public Television programs, I believe it is necessary to discuss briefly some other examples of theatre performing history. Much of the prejudice against being considered mere “actors” by many historians comes from the historians’ observations of how theatre has presented history on stage. Most historians would hesitate to term what they see on stage “history,” considering it instead a nice entertaining evening that gives a nod to some historical event or person. It is this dismissal that they wish to avoid in their own work. They attempt this avoidance by denying their work is a theatrical endeavor, thereby maintaining their sense of legitimacy. Yet, to give the theatre its due, the goals it seeks to achieve via the message it is presenting through an historical context are complex and varied. What was seen as history to one audience later evolves into a symbolic representation of values, morals and mores no less important than historical narratives. In this chapter I examine the way history has been presented on stage. I focus primarily on the American stage since America is a relatively new nation and therefore the relationship between the event and the audience is not so removed in time. I also restrict my examples to America for the sake of consistency, since all other site examples presented in this dissertation are located in America. This examination culminates in an analysis of the creation of outdoor historical drama. It is the close proximity in
time to the event that is often used to explain the popularity of outdoor historical dramas and the rise of these venues across the United States.

_In the beginning…_

“We can learn from the past” is not just a clichéd phrase used by historians to justify requiring reluctant college students to take history courses. The famous phrase from George Santayana’s _The Life of Reason_ that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (Santayana 150) suggests the idea that History encompasses the collective knowledge of a people who can learn not only from their successes but from also from their failures. This is a notion that did not originate with Santayana, but was presented by Thucydides ( _Peloponnesian War_, book 1, section 22), and Euripides (in _Phrixus_). Dramatizing events has been a natural methodology in readily passing knowledge on from generation to generation since the dawn of man. The recognition of the value of that practice has been recognized for almost as long a period of time.

Evidence from ancient Egypt suggests that stories about their gods were enacted as part of religious festivals or rites. Though these stories are often relegated to mythology by modern scholars, for the Egyptians the gods were real and their life stories were history. Within the telling of the event, communal values and morals are also expressed. Later, stories about men and their relations to and interactions with the gods appeared often on the Greek and Roman stage. Though little or no archeological evidence exists to corroborate the existence of such characters as Oedipus or Medea, the audience saw these characters as the embodiment of real historical people and the events from their lives. Historical accuracy could not have been an
important consideration, as evidenced by the plethora of plays that once existed about Oedipus. What was said, how they dressed, and what the houses looked like changed from play to play, but the main points of the story remained the same. The point was that one should learn from the consequences of the character’s actions and not make the same mistakes.

This approach to dramatizing the past continued to be utilized in later ages. In the Middle Ages, the plays by playwrights, such as Hrotsvitha, retell the lives of saints, real people who made real sacrifices for the church. The cycle plays of York, Wakefield, and others retell the stories from the Bible not as mere allegory but as historical fact. Shakespeare, in many of his plays, recounts the lives of real English kings. In every case, though, the playwright has had to create the dialogue surrounding the event depicted thereby taking the performance further away from historical accuracy. Evidence seems to suggest that the costumes were similar to everyday dress of the times. On Shakespeare’s stage, Julius Caesar’s toga was wrapped around the actor’s Renaissance dress as a suggestion of character and time. It was not until the advent of Naturalism and Realism during the nineteenth century that the quest for authenticity became an important consideration for the stage. This also coincided with the advent of new forms of historical research as heralded by van Ranke as previously discussed.

Early America

Many historians of American theatre tend to categorize the early theatrical endeavors, from the Revolution through the nineteenth century, merely as colonial imitations of Europe. Though this might be true when it comes to form and execution, it is the content that will reflect
nationalism. Alan Downer in his history of American theatre characterized this distinction stating:

Form, after all, is rarely an invention; it is a growth. And the basic forms of European drama, both classical and modern, had slowly evolved through centuries of religious rituals. . . . No such rituals lay in the American past to provide a vehicle for the expression of those truths we held to be self-evident. It was necessary to take what vehicles were available. . . . and convert them to the uses of the republic. For this was to be drama with a purpose, the high, noble, and difficult purpose of making good citizens out of its audiences. (2)

This attitude can readily be seen in 1787 with The Contrast, a play by Royall Tyler. Tyler is often considered to be the first American playwright, “that is, the first man with so completely an American background to present a play to the theatre after the completion of the Revolution” (3). Though this play is not based on a specific historical event, its two main characters represent the two predominant attitudes that existed in post-Revolution America: those who idolize and pine for England, and those who have severed the bonds with England and look to the future of this new republican country.

Many of the early plays tend to be representative of the American character as it sought to define itself, and many playwrights turned to historical events and famous persons for the inspiration of their works. One of the earliest examples of this was The Battle of Bunker Hill in 1776 by Hugh Brackenridge, written one year after the famous battle. Very little is known about its performance history. A year later he wrote The Death of General Montgomery. More is known about a later Revolutionary War piece, Bunker-Hill, or The Death of General Warren: An Historic Tragedy in 1797 by John Daly Burk. Though heavily criticized with comments after its
opening performance in 1797 like “deplorable play” by William Dunlap and “the most execrable of the Grub Street kind” by John B Williamson of the Federal Street Theatre (Moody 62), it had great success with audiences. This may have been due in no small part to the fact that the premier was at the Haymarket Theatre in Boston. The dramatization of a major battle of the Revolution, which had taken place a mere twenty-two years earlier just outside of Boston, would have stirred the memories and passions of many in the audience. This play exemplifies the dynamic between the dramatization of an historical event and that event’s relationship to the audience relative to the success of the play.

Freddy Rokem in his book *Performing History*, describes this dynamic as “social energies,” a concept also explored by Stephen Greenblatt in his discussions on Shakespeare. “Social energies” can be defined as the emotional connection that a given audience has with the events on being portrayed. He believes that the closer the connection that the audience has with the events, the more powerful the social energies. As more time passes between the event and the audience, these social energies change. This is readily seen through the performance history of *Bunker-Hill*. When first performed, many members of the audience probably had first hand knowledge of the battle either by having lived in proximity to it or having fought in it. The social energies would have been very strong. This relationship with the play can also work against a production in that its historical accuracy may be more readily challenged, or the audience may not yet be ready to revisit certain powerful circumstances so soon after the event. Yet that an emotional connection can exist between the audience and the performance help to explain the success of various historically based dramas as will be discusses further in this chapter.
Although *Bunker-Hill* ran in Boston for only ten performances, over the next twelve years it would be performed throughout the Eastern seaboard. It gained the reputation of being the patriotic piece to perform when one needed a patriotic piece. This was especially true during the war of 1812. This sentiment was reflected in the announcement of the play by the Anthony Street Theatre for its August 29, 1814 performance: “Let the Rallying Word be Liberty or Death” (Moody 66).

There were many plays based on events of the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and early Americans. Plays like *Paul Revere and the Sons of Liberty*, a play in six parts performed every evening starting March 27, 1876, afternoons on Wednesday and Saturday, at the Boston Museum would see resurgence in popularity during the centennial celebrations of 1876. It was reported to “embody incidents of the Revolutionary War. Each event pictured through the medium of spirited tableaux and exciting dramatic action.” This is according to an original playbill in the author’s collection.

Other plays focused on situations peculiar to America, such as relationships between white settlers and Native Americans, or plots involving Abolitionists. Most notable of the plays about Native Americans, usually referred to as “noble savages,” are *Ponitouch* by Robert Rogers (1766), *Metamora, or the Last of the Wampanoags* by John Augustus Stone (1829), and *Po-ca-hon-tas, or The Gentle Savage* by John Brougham (1855). Totaled, there were about seventy-five plays written in the nineteenth century presenting Native American characters as major figures in the plots. Rogers’ character Ponitouch established the archetype of the noble savage that would be emulated in later plays. Moody states:

The romantic conception of the Indian’s character as the archetype of the human nobility reflected the early-nineteenth century notions of ethical excellence. The
Indian was brave, chivalrous, kind, and gentle toward his squaw and his children. He respected the achievements of his forebears and honored their name. And he held an unaltering belief and trust in the will of the Almighty Manitou. Even in his normal day-to-day conduct he epitomized the nineteenth-century concept of the virtuous man. (203)

These plays allowed the audience to feel sympathy for the Native American and his tragedy at the hands of the Americans while at the same time feeling justified that the fate of the noble savage was inevitable based on the American sense of Manifest Destiny as proclaimed by Thomas Jefferson. Though wholesale slaughter and persecution of the Native Americans was occurring as Americans moved west, these plays praised the nobility of their passing. The type of history represented here exemplifies the adage that history is written by winners who were justified in their actions. Authenticity was not the goal, but these plays have enough of an historical basis that the audience does not dismiss them as mere entertainment but as real and relevant to their lives. The goal of many “historical” plays seems to be the dissemination of a message that goes beyond mere history, and that it has a moving and educational impact on the audience, not unlike like Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* supposedly had for the Athenians.

As the Civil War was waged and the United States became less assured of its unity, playwrights were given new historical fodder for their endeavors. Prior to the outbreak of war, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, later dramatized by George L. Aikin (1852). Though it does not reflect any specific event, Stowe was adamant as to its historical authenticity and would not let it be relegated to being merely a fictitious invention. In her work, *The Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Presenting the Original Facts and Documents upon which the Story is
Founded, Together with Corroborative Statements Verifying the Truth of the Work (1853), she states:

This work has been a collection and arrangement of real incidents, of actions really performed, of words and expressions really uttered, grouped together with reference to a general result. (Moody 51)

Throughout its performance history, which lasted well into the twentieth century, the historical relevance of this play has had varying affects on its audience. When first performed, it spoke to a primarily contemporary audience about a contemporary issue. Lincoln said of the book: “So you’re the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war!” (Moody 351). Post Civil War audiences saw it as the past plight of the black man in America that had been overcome by the freeing of the slaves. Soon the piece became merely an historical echo no longer reflective of contemporary concerns facing black America.

These plays, though based in history, typically fall under the modern heading of Melodrama, a categorization which Stowe and Stone would not have approved of for their plays. These plays, and others like them, have become the vehicles through which the myth of America has evolved. Jeffrey Mason in his book, Melodrama and the Myth of America, writes that melodrama helped to create the social constructs that were, for a time, the basis of American identity. This is history constructed through a nostalgic lens. Like most perceptions of the past that are nostalgic in nature they are more myth than fact, a kind of myth that is associated with the desire to return.

Return to what was or return to what is imagined, but always return to what should be. The plays seem to be diachronic, but are in fact synchronic. That is, they purport to present change and evolution, but because the change is actually a
matter of return and restoration, that history is static, so there can be no
diachronicity. . . *Metamora* looks back one-and-a-half centuries to champion
those values that led to the establishment of a republic, an event its retrospection
present as inevitable. . . *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* reduces societal dysfunction to a
personal level and enacts an impossible fantasy of social changes whose terms
and interactions deny the validity of the problem and leave society essentially
intact. (Mason 195)

Mason further believes that the myth created through the melodramas not only idealizes
American society but creates an ideal society that is “America.” In these plays, “America is
somehow threatened but emerges unscathed from the conflict whose outcome is a foregone
conclusion. The idea of America is equivalent to the moral order, and it is that which the action
of each play restores” (Mason 197). More than a moment of history is being play out on the
stage. It is America itself, not as it might have been to the audience but the America that they
want to believe once existed and can exist again.

In the nineteenth century the merger of the melodramatic form with historical events and
people became a popular methodology for playwrights to create plays that gave affirmation to
their audiences that the path this country was taking was a righteous one. Such plays included
Bartley Campbell’s *The White Slave* (1882), Bronson Howard’s *Shenandoah* (1888), and David
Balasco’s *The Heart of Maryland* (1895). The basic aspects of melodrama readily suited this
goal.

Using the strengths of melodrama – a simplified moral universe, easily
comprehensible characters, and exiting characters – these playwrights sought to
integrate the recent past for their audiences by presenting a dramatized history
which testified to the enduring values – individual dignity, political freedom, and
the indivisibility of the union – ostensibly reaffirmed by the war. (Richardson
130)

The blurring of myth and history is not new, as exemplified as far back as the works of
Homer, and these plays can still speak to us about moments of strife from this country’s not so
long ago past.

Outdoor Historical Drama

“It has been said that America has really only made two major contributions to world
theatre, and that’s the musical and outdoor historical drama” (Institute of Outdoor Drama).
Though many theatre historians might argue with this statement, the outdoor historical drama has
long been a very American way of capitalizing on local history. Scott Parker, director of the
Institute of Outdoor Drama, in an interview with Angela Spivey, spoke of his belief that these
dramas are important because they are about a specific event performed where the event took
place. “People go to see these dramas to walk on the hallowed ground as if they’re taking a
pilgrimage to see the event dramatized and made real and alive to them” (Spivey). In this way
they are similar to the living history museums.

What also makes them unique and different from a typical play is the manner of
production. These plays are written to be performed at a specific site, at or near where the
original event being performed occurred. They run primarily during the summer, five nights a
week for two or three months. They are usually the only production done in that space. In many
cases, the production space was built specifically for that particular production. Some venues have opted to expand their seasons to include other productions, but this is not the norm.

According to the Institute of Outdoor Drama, outdoor historical drama is defined as:

Original plays with music and dance based on significant events and performed in amphitheatres located where the events actually occurred. . . . A dramatic form of storytelling, an examination of recorded events that reinforces the value of preserving cultural, political and social history. It is also a living memorial to the people who fought for religious and political freedom, laid groundwork for American humanistic movements, and blazed new trail in the cultural arts.

(Institute)

In other words, the outdoor historical dramas are justifying their existence as presenters of preservers of history.

The first American outdoor historical drama of note took place in 1937 in Manteo, North Carolina with the production of Paul Green’s *The Lost Colony*. It was part of a festival to celebrate the 400th birthday of Virginia Dare, the first English child born in the colonies. The play is the story of the establishment and disappearance of Sir Walter Raleigh’s colonists on Roanoke Island. With the success of the play, other communities began commissioning plays about their significant local events. The Institute of Outdoor Drama was created in 1963 as part of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It is the only national institute that helps to coordinate the efforts of outdoor dramas across the United States. Besides historical plays, the Institute works with other dramas including Shakespeare Festivals and Passion Plays. In 2004, the Institute’s roster included 111 theatres: 37 historical dramas, 66 Shakespeare festivals, and 8 religious or “passion” plays in 36 states. California has
the most outdoor theatres with sixteen, and North Carolina boasts the most outdoor theatres solely focused on historical events with twelve venues. According to the Institute’s survey of 2004, of the 111 theatres associated with the Institute 104 reported attendance records. The total attendance for their combined seasons was 1,909,273 people.

Unfortunately, because they are outdoor venues, cancellations of performances are inevitable due to weather. Yet of the 3,689 scheduled performances, they only had 192 cancellations. There has been a decline in recent years in attendance and the number of venues but the Institute reports that these numbers reflect broader fluctuations in tourism overall. The effect that these theatres have goes beyond the mere regurgitation of local history and can have an impact on the local economy. In a 1994 report, the twelve venues in North Carolina earned more than $2,000,000. The Institute estimates that for every dollar spent on ticket sales, 3.5 dollars is spent on other local businesses like hotels, restaurants and souvenir stands in the area. Therefore, though the theatres earned $2,000,000, the local areas earned a cumulative total of about $17,000,000. The Institute further calculated that when the operating budgets of the theatres and sales taxes were added to these numbers, the economic impact on North Carolina topped $75,000,000 (Spivey). Numbers like these have encouraged communities around the country to invest in establishing outdoor historical theatres of their own with the hopes of benefiting from tourist revenues. Ohio has recently opened its newest theatre, \textit{Johnny Appleseed}, in Ashland, Ohio bringing its total number of venues to seven for the state. It is hard to deny that outdoor historical drama has made performing history big business.

Most outdoor historical plays are based in the symphonic drama format. Paul Green defines it as “that type of drama in which all elements of theatre art are used to sound together, one for all and all for one – symphonic in the original Greek sense of the work – a true
democracy” (Green 5). Music plays an important part in these dramas whether it is a piece written to express the passions of the moment in the traditional musical theatre sense or a local folk tune from the history of the region. Dance is also integral to the production. Most of the dance pieces are also site specific such as dances based on the traditions of the tribe represented or pioneer square-dancing.

The success of these plays parallels the successful rise of living museums during the twentieth century. Is it a mere coincident that the first outdoor historical drama opened just five years after the opening of the first building at Colonial Williamsburg? Or is it symptomatic of the growing interest in finding new and interesting ways to engage history? Aspects of these two avenues, the living history museums and the outdoor historical dramas have come together again with the PBS productions, especially indicative with the Colonial House. This dynamic is further explored in the conclusion. The rest of this chapter explores an example of historical drama, Trumpet in the Land.

Trumpet in the Land

In 1970, Paul Green’s symphonic drama Trumpet in the Land opened in Northeastern Ohio. Green wrote fifteen symphonic dramas which Vincent Kenny, in his biography on Green, divides into two categories: those that deal with the exploration of the New World, and those that recreate events in the United States after the Revolution (97). Trumpet in the Land falls under the second of these categories.

Until Trumpet in the Land, Green had been struggling with “a better statement of man’s dilemma of war and peace to conclude with” as he wrote to his friend and fellow playwright
Cheryl Crawford (Avery 681). His solution was to focus on peace and coming to terms with pacifism in the face of war. He used the symbolism associated with Gabriel and his trumpet to represent the Christian themes in the play, and the very unchristian behavior of the Americans responsible for the massacre. The “Trumpet” in this case is the leader of the Moravian missionaries in Ohio, David Zeisberger. Zeisberger is characteristic of the man who refuses to pick up a gun, a decision which may have been what ultimately brought tragedy to his people. Green questions the wisdom of this stance while acknowledging that even the very pacifist minded Martin Luther King admitted that even he would pick up a gun against Hitler (Avery 681).

Trumpet in the Land is set in the Schoenbrunn Valley in the former settlement of Gnadenhütten, near modern day New Philadelphia, Ohio. Moravian missionaries created the first settlement in Ohio there in 1772 when Ohio was the Western frontier. The plot of the play revolves around the tensions between the settlers, many of whom were Native Americans converted to Christianity, and the dynamics of the Revolutionary War which would lead to tragedy:

When the Revolutionary War broke out, Zeisberger and his followers found themselves caught between the British Army at Fort Detroit and the American forces at Fort Pitt. By refusing to take sides in the struggle, Zeisberger and his people incurred the wrath of both warring parties, which eventually led to the brutal massacre of 96 Christian Indians at Gnadenhütten in 1782 by a band of American militiamen. . . . (Trumpet)

The play attempts to recreate as faithfully as possible the events that led up to the massacre and the massacre itself, carefully staged out of sight but audible to the audience.
Performing in an open air theatre has its advantages and disadvantages. The amphitheater, specially built for this production, allows for a greater sense of historical recreation in terms of space and atmosphere. The hillside that the stage space merges with is used for spectacular effects that are typically not possible on an indoor stage. Horses gallop on, guns are fired, and the cabins located in the distance are set on fire. Standard stage settings are also utilized with cutaway homes and the church that travel on and off stage. An intricate sound system is employed since acoustics are a problem. The audience is able to engage the action from a voyeuristic point of view as they seem to be looking upon an actual event taking place before their eyes amid the hills of the Schoenbrunn Valley. It is easy to suspend one’s disbelief as real crickets and birds can be heard adding to the ambience of the production.

This type of space has its drawbacks. Rain is always a concern. If it begins to rain during the production, the decision to stop the show is dependant upon how hard it is raining and for how long. If it is a light rain, the show may continue or stop briefly, then resume. Another problem is the lighting. Performances occur at dusk. A lighting problem will usually stop the show. The stage itself can be problematic for the horses if it is wet or muddy. It is not uncommon for horses to slide down the hills and skid across the stage. There are also occasional airplanes flying overhead which can jolt the audience quickly back to the twenty-first century. Yet most of these challenges are taken in stride by the actors and the audience. They are part of what makes going to an outdoor historical drama an unique experience.

To aid in the realism, all the technical elements are as true to period as possible. The costumer has replicated Revolutionary War British uniforms, what the settlers and militiamen wore, and Native American dress for several different tribes like the Wyandot and Delaware. Over its thirty-five year history, these have been updated as new information has arisen.
Similarly, the prop-master has recreated historical reproductions for all the props including the
tack for the horses. These same concerns have been addressed at the living history museums
mirroring the changes in performances at these site to that of the outdoor historical dramas. The
biggest complaint comes from the actors who are light skinned yet have to play Native
Americans. Night after night they have to apply the make-up to darken any skin that might
show. They say that by the end of the season, everything they own has the residue of this make-
up on it, and that it takes months to eliminate. The need for historical accuracy has become a
necessity with these productions in order to maintain their claim that what the audience is seeing
is the recreation on stage of an historical moment. Granted the musical aspects of these
productions, as actors periodically break out into song and dance, stretches the realms of
believability, but Green has attempted to maintain their use within plausibility. Most of the
songs are typical folk tunes sung around the campfire or hymns in church. There is square
dancing which fits the ambiance if not quite period, and usually an actor or two performs typical
Native American dances of the period associated with the local tribes.

Former President and historian Teddy Roosevelt called the massacre at Gnadenhütten a
“stain on the frontier character that time cannot wash away” (Trumpet). The play attempts to
capture this sentiment and the essence of the events surrounding the massacre at Gnadenhütten.
Though liberties have been taken in terms of the narrative by abridging the story to fit within the
limited time allotment inherent with such performances, the production attempts to capture the
significance of those events and the horror associated with them.
Conclusion

The history that has been performed on the American stage over the past two hundred years has dealt with a recent past and usually had a chauvinistic agenda. As a result, it tends to be readily dismissed by historians who point out historical inaccuracies. This attitude of academic superiority drives a wedge between historians and performers when it comes to developing living history museums. The outdoor historical drama, though developing on a parallel path with that of the living history museums, is seen by those involved with the museums as not as legitimate a representation of history even though they both have the same goal: to make history accessible and more engaging to the public. Many of these plays have been deemed no better than their melodramatic ancestors, differing only in the outdoor nature of their venues. In the final analysis, the living history museums and the outdoor historical dramas actually have much in common, but these similarities tend to be ignored in light of their perceived differences. Beyond common goals, both methodologies have the same problem when representing history. A certain amount of the presentations in both venues will always be a fictional account based on the evidence at hand and any written commentary that may exist. Since the living history museums do not use a “script,” per se, they use this distinction as a means to distance themselves from having their work relegated to being merely another form of theatre. This is a specious argument. Whether working off a scenario or memorizing words from a “script,” almost everything said by actors and interpreters alike is a modern manifestation, making the distinction a moot point.

Both approaches also strive for historical accuracy in the presentation of clothing and artifacts. They both have a deep-seated respect for the history they are presenting and the
importance of the message they are sending, though admittedly these productions are abridged versions of the past and are not exact moment-by-moment recreations. They could learn from each other to improve their presentations. The combination of elements from both disciplines, as well as that of the experimental archeological sites should have been incorporated into the PBS productions. These productions, especially in the case of the *Colonial House*, faltered as a result of placing primacy of the constructs of the living history museums over those of the outdoor historical dramas.
CHAPTER 3

THE AMERICAN LIVING HISTORY MUSEUM: TWO CASE STUDIES

Colonial Williamsburg: A Patriotic Performance

That the Future May Learn from the Past

In New History in an Old Museum, Richard Handler related an interview with two women who had just witnessed an enactment of a day in the life at the Wyeth House at Colonial Williamsburg during the 1990 Christmas season. One of those interviewed, Jean, stated that it was very authentic . . . . an excellent job . . . . The actors were trying to say this is the way it was (109). How did she know it was authentic and that what was depicted reflected how it was? What aspects of the performance brought her to those conclusions? Was it the authority she ascribed to the guide or the level of realism assumed in the performance, or both? Why did she accept what was portrayed as real? Does a suspension of disbelief play a part of an unspoken agreement upon entering Colonial Williamsburg? What would Jean say to those who saw earlier enactments at Colonial Williamsburg shaped by other agendas when she compared these enactments to the reality she witnessed? The relationship between the visitors and the desired perception of history presented at Colonial Williamsburg has changed over its seventy-five year history. Yet though history is being enacted, in other words performed, those involved with the site continue to resist the notion that their endeavors fall within the scope of a theatrical performance. It is a paradox that some believe serves nothing and may actually hinder Williamsburg quest for authenticity. To understand this dynamic it is necessary to know something of the history of Colonial Williamsburg, especially the changes in focus as professed
in updates of Williamsburg’s mission statements and the relationship that performances plays in its construct.

*The Early Years*

Colonial Williamsburg is an uniquely American version of the living history museum. It all began as the brainchild of William Archer Rutherford Goodwin, a professor of philosophy and social science at the College of William and Mary. He first arrived at Williamsburg in 1903 and became enamored with the historical city. He envisioned restoring Williamsburg to its original colonial setting as he saw reflected in the many buildings from that period still standing. Yet, in 1907, he was offered and accepted a new post as rector at a parish in Rochester, New York. It would not be until 1923 that he would have the opportunity to return to Williamsburg. What he saw was very disturbing. Many of the older buildings had been destroyed to make way for twentieth-century advancement. More than ever, he believed that what remained must be saved (Hume 93). He realized that this massive undertaking would take substantial financial backing. To this end, in 1924, he approached Edsel Ford to ask his father to buy Colonial Williamsburg. Unfortunately for Goodwin, Henry Ford=s time and money was being totally consumed with his pet project of creating Greenfield Village. Undaunted, in 1926, Goodwin sought out John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who after much discussion, accepted the challenge.

A 1930 phonograph recording stating sums up Rockefeller’s thoughts about the restoration:

The Restoration will be educational. Modern windows will open on vistas stretching through the distance into the past.
The Restoration will be inspirational, in that it will recall to present and to future
generations the faith and the sacrifice of the nation builders.

Through this Restoration, a shrine will be created that will serve to stimulate
patriotism, that will develop in American citizens a deeper love of their native
land as they come to understand the things that happened here, without which the
foundations of the federal republic could not have been securely laid. (Colonial
Williams Foundation, Legacy 7)

The restoration of Williamsburg was the first such project to attempt restoring a whole
community at its original site. Greenfield Village is a different type of historical site in that it is
a collection of historical buildings brought to the site for preservation. It was Goodwin’s concept
of a reconstructed community that especially appealed to Rockefeller as expressed in a 1937
article:

To undertake to preserve a single building when its environment has changed and
is no longer in keeping has always seemed to me unsatisfactory. . . .The
restoration of Williamsburg, however, offered an opportunity to restore a
complete area and free it entirely from alien or inharmonious surroundings as well
as to preserve the beauty and charm of the old buildings and gardens of the city
and its historic significance. Thus it made a unique and irresistible appeal. (Rouse
20)

Rockefeller’s comments parallel the mission statement of the restoration project:

To re-create accurately the environment of the man and women of 18th-century
Williamsburg and to bring about such an understanding of the lives and times that
present and future generations may more vividly appreciate the contribution of these early Americans to the ideals and culture of our country. (51)

With the opening of the first restored building, the Raleigh Tavern, in September 1932, the dream was becoming a reality. As he saw his project coming to life, Rockefeller wrote:

As the work has progressed, I have come to feel that perhaps an even greater value (than the preservation of the beauty and charm of the old building and gardens) is the lesson that it teaches of the patriotism, high purpose, and unselfish devotion of our forefathers to the common good. If this proves to be true, any expenditure made there will be amply justified. (Rockefeller 1)

To this end, he and his family would invest over fifty million dollars into the project during the first thirty years of the reconstruction.

Goodwin himself wrote A Brief and True Report (1936) as the first guide book to the opening of Colonial Williamsburg. It describes the history of the town in colonial times and the history of the restoration which included this statement of purpose.

Those who have worked for the fulfillment of the endeavor, the hope is this: that the Williamsburg Restoration will, in each of its spheres and phases and through them all, revive and retained something of the strength and beauty of another age something of the spirit of the men who lived in it and made it great; that it may say of them as Pericles said of the Athenian dead: Aso they gave their bodies to the Commonwealth, and received, each for his own memory, praise that will never die; and with it the grandest of all sepulchers, not that in which their mortal bones are laid, but a home in the minds of man, where their glory remains fresh to stir to speech or action as occasion comes. For the whole Earth is the sepulcher of
famous men; and their story is not graven only on stone over their native Earth, but lives on far away, without visible symbol, woven into the stuff of other men=s lives. (Goodwin 149)

The classical and/or historical reference to Pericles of Athens reflects the patriotic ideals that Colonial Williamsburg held as Goodwin compared the strengths of that ancient democratic society with the new democracy that was created by America’s forefathers.

During World War II, programs were instituted in cooperation with the Defense Department=s information education program. One emphasis of Williamsburg=s programs now became to Ateach democracy and citizenship to groups of servicemen brought to Williamsburg daily and to others reached by motion pictures in their camps@ (Rouse 46). Though the program initially was created for the servicemen, it was later expanded after the war for the general public. Not only did it serve as a means of encouraging patriotism at home, it attempted to exemplify what it means to be American to visitors from abroad. The performances encompassed in these programs were reflective of the news reels and patriotic propaganda seen during the war and now created in reaction to Cold War sentiments.

Post WWII

In light of the Cold War and the subsequent fears about the spread of communism, John D. Rockefeller III determined that Colonial Williamsburg was the perfect site for promoting American ideals in terms of republicanism in the United States versus communism behind the Iron Curtain. To this end he proposed that Colonial Williamsburg=s programs take a more active part in this political struggle. This approach caused a major rift between him and his
father, the elder Rockefeller. John D. Rockefeller Jr. encouraged the patriotic message behind the restoration but did not feel that its mission was to lecture to the visitors. His son believed that Colonial Williamsburg was in a unique position to further the fight against communism on an international as well as national front. The board agreed seeing an opportunity to bring the past alive by using it as an example not only of the strength and heroism of the past but as a rallying cry for the present. Williamsburg’s President Kenneth Chorley proclaims in his president=s report of 1951:

The voice of Colonial Williamsburg carries far - perhaps especially today - because at an historic time of trial, questioning, and danger it speaks of a deep faith in the rights of man, in liberty of the human spirit, in responsibility, in courage and devotion to duty. Here men can refresh their souls in every age: That the Future May Learn from the Past [Chorley=s emphasis]. (Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., Colonial 10)

Yet, the overriding focus of the project remained on the lives and achievements of the great men of the Revolution and their association with Williamsburg. As Chorley stated in his speech to the Royal Institute in London, Aperhaps there is no better time than this to recall that it was the uncommon men who ushered in the era of the Common Man@ (Chorley, Commonwealth 23). The changes he instituted would attempt further to bring history alive as the project delved more into the emotional impact that the past can have on the present. In his book, The City That Turned Back Time, Parke Rouse observes:

The ramifications of this new phase are enormous. In many respects is the most difficult of any of the work which we have undertaken at the same time it is tremendously absorbing because it is so largely concerned with human interest
and deals with the spiritual or inspirational and educative qualities inherent in the restoration. (46)

The new programs were meant to inspire not only a renewed respect for our forefathers but the belief that the same greatness that existed then still exists today. Yet the patriotic message instituted in reaction to the Cold War differs little from the use of Revolutionary war themes in performances during the centennial celebrations such as *Paul Revere and the Sons of Liberty*. As later historians will comment, the Revolutionary era of the Untied States comes close to being mythologized at Williamsburg basing its narrative as much in nostalgia as historical evidence. The perceived greatness of the past is positioned to strengthen the American resolve in the face of looming communist threat, real or otherwise.

John D. Rockefeller III created the Special Survey Committee the purpose of which was to propose ideas leading to new programs. Ultimately he sought to foster American ideals around the globe and to promote the restoration=s growing agenda\(\) (Greenspan 97). The Commission came back with its version of the differences between republicanism and communism that would define these new programs:

- the will of the state vs. the will of the individual; materialism vs. idealism; no God vs. God; the Communist controlled world state vs. self-determination;
- imperialism (Russian variety) vs. nationalism; security vs. freedom. (99)

These ideals were reflected throughout the restoration as guides, hostesses and films stressed the glories of the Revolutionary War, compared them to the success achieved in the name of freedom with the end of World War II, and warned of the new threat to freedom in the form of communism. The focus remained on what was being fought for and not on what was being fought against. It was important to the board that Colonial Williamsburg be seen not only as a
reminder of the struggle for freedoms our forefathers sought, but also as a means to instill a notion that it was now the responsibility of the present generation to maintain those freedoms.

1960s

In the late 1960s, unquestioning patriotism was challenged by anti-government sentiment resulting from the country’s involvement in Vietnam. Williamsburg adapted to this change in sentiment. Though John D. Rockefeller III would set up a foundation to continue the support of the project in the 1960’s, efforts had been underway to make the project self-supporting. In 1964, Chorley’s successor, President Humelsine, offered a new declaration of purpose that shifted Williamsburg’s focus from patriotism to education and historical appreciation. The new purposes were termed “the six appeals:” architecture and town planning, collections of English and American Furniture, gardens, archeology, the handcraft program, and the events of the Revolutionary era important in the birth of the country. Humelsine’s new focus was framed not as a reaction to sociological and political changes but as a means of reemphasizing the original purpose of Williamsburg as reflected in Goodwin’s *Brief and True Report*. Humelsine also referred to the comment made in 1937 by J. D. Rockefeller Jr. stating thus it made a unique and irresistible appeal focusing on the word *appeal* in his declaration (Humelsine 1).

A close examination of Chorley’s report of 1951 shows that these appeals were not all that new but were being utilized with a different focus. These “six appeals” have always been a part of the consideration toward historical representation at Williamsburg. The difference was in their execution in relation to the renewed philosophy based in educational and historical constructs and away from overt patriotism.
1970s – Present

The focus shifted again in the late 1970s with the rise of social historicism. Chorley’s approach had emphasized the role of the uncommon man as instrumental in the creation of the era of the Common Man, ignoring the role that the common man has played in the creation of American society. Correcting this oversight would become the focus of the social historians in their continued recreation of Colonial Williamsburg up to the present day. The current mission statement on the Williamsburg website clearly reflects the social historical approach:

To help the future learn from the past by preserving and restoring 18th century Williamsburg and by engaging, informing, and inspiring people as they learn about this historic colonial capital, the events that occurred here, and the diverse people who helped shape our new nation. (*Mission of Colonial Williamsburg: History*)

Prior to the Civil Rights movement, segregation was the law in Virginia. Colonial Williamsburg maintained segregation at its hotels and restaurants, and its visitor base remained primarily white. At the site, though, groups of tourists always had been desegregated. It was not until the 1950s that changes began to occur with the desegregation of hotels and restaurants sponsored by the restoration. Until the late 1970s, significant representation of African-Americans, who historically comprised half of the population of Colonial Williamsburg, was absent. This oversight was addressed with the creation of African-Americans’ habitations, and the telling of their stories. To this end, the foundation created the Department of African-American Interpretation and Programs, the AAIP, in 1988.
Mark Bograd and Theresa Singleton ("The interpretation of Slavery") describe the development of representation of African-Americans at Williamsburg. Prior to this move in the late 1970s, the first indication of interest in representing the African-American presence can be seen with the Board commissioning Thad Tate to write a history of Williamsburg’s black community. Tate’s book, *The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg*, was written in the late 1950s but not published until 1965 (Bograd 200). It would be another fourteen years before performances based on this research would be included in Williamsburg’s interpretive programs. In 1979, a special tour was created that focused on the slave trade and slave life in Williamsburg called *The Other Half*. Slavery was discussed at Wetherburn Tavern and African-American employees were seen performing at the Benjamin Powell house. Finally, in 1988, three slave cabins at Carter’s Grove were erected and staffed, interpreting the daily lives of the black residents (Bograd 200).

**Performance:**

From the beginning, performative constructs have been an integral part of Colonial Williamsburg regardless of any antitheatrical sentiments that might exist toward acknowledging this. Changes in performance have been reflected in the changes in emphases at Williamsburg over time. Visitors arriving at the opening of the Raleigh Tavern in 1932 were greeted by Hostesses. Hostesses primarily were local society women dressed in period costumes, and they continued to be a part of Williamsburg as the site grew. They conducted tours and answered question about the restoration. These hostesses were usually older white women from the more prominent families in town. They tended to exude an air of Southern gentility and
respectability that fulfilled the expectations of most of the visitor’s idea of colonial civility (Greenspan 47).

At this time all commentary and discussion were presented in the third person. Historically costumed hostesses discussed events in the past as opposed to representing an enactment of that past. As with any performance a comprehensive rehearsal period was established in the form of a training program for the hostesses. In these early years, future president Kenneth Chorley, then director of the educational programs, stated:

We must give him (the visitor) a general idea or understanding of the whole. . . .
We must give him something of the spirit we must at least introduce him to the great ghosts of those who built this place, and from it reached out to aid so greatly in the building of a nation. (Greenspan 47)

At the end of the training program, prospective hostesses were given an exam, and, if they passed, would move on to their allocated position at one of the buildings in the site. Though the job that these women were doing would fall within Kirby’s continuum as simple acting, no acting training was part of their program.

As the popularity of Colonial Williamsburg grew, the hostesses, who were only assigned to particular buildings, proved to be inadequate to serve the needs of the growing number of visitors. Though maps of the site were available, a clear direction of how to get the most out of the experience was lacking. Within Williamsburg’s first few years, this dilemma led enterprising, free-lancing locals to set themselves up as “official” guides to the restoration, taking on Colonial personae complete with costumes, and charging for individual or group tours. The money went solely into their own pockets. These guides, unfortunately, were not always up to the task. Many lacked sufficient historical information to answer visitor questions adequately.
Overcharging and the subsequent bad publicity concerning poor guides spurred the board to address the situation. In 1935, the board established a new training program for hostesses and employees hired as guides. Official Colonial Williamsburg Guides were trained, given an exam, and certified, just like the hostesses. With the establishment of this program, freelance guides were no longer permitted. The official guides worked in cooperation with the hostesses. Their primary responsibility was to escort visitors to the buildings and exhibits within which the hostesses would take over the narrative (Greenspan 46).

An official Reception Center was added in 1957 as part of a new and extensive interpretive program instituted by John D. Rockefeller III. Before entering the site proper, the visitors received a series of presentations at the Reception Center to provide information, and to prepare them for what they were about to experience. Presentations made up of “motion pictures, slide programs, and illustrated lectures are intended to make vivid to the viewer the kind of world in which eighteenth century Americans lived” (Rouse 42).

Though intended only as information, the motion pictures, slide programs, and illustrated lectures are in actuality performances that frame the historical context of the site and are a determining factor in how that history is to be perceived by the visitors. Performances at the Reception Center frame the stories of the interpreters and other performers within the context of an historical narrative that reinforces the authenticity of their performances and the agenda of the board.

It was at the new Reception Center that the shifting focus of Colonial Williamsburg from national history to a symbol of national patriotism was first presented to the public through the changes in the performances there. In May of 1956, the Williamsburg foundation produced a film entitled Williamsburg: The Story of a Patriot, premiering in 1957. The film emphasizes the
patriotic agenda and the pro-American message advocated by John D. Rockefeller III. It tells the story of the early struggle for freedom and also outlines the ideals of republicanism that the authorities of Colonial Williamsburg in the 1950s wished to instill in its visitors. Thus, the Reception Center and film were a form of indoctrination for the visitors supporting the Cold War agenda of the 1950s. As Greenspan put it: “The visit to Colonial Williamsburg had become a packaged experience that was carefully regulated by the restoration to portray the themes that they [sic] wished to promote” (112). This film was as much an affirmation of the “American way” as an historical look at early Williamsburg with a tendency to blur history and nostalgia in its attempt to support a patriotic agenda. This was a performance that sought to excite the “social energies” of the audience not unlike the outdoor historical dramas.

The influence of social history in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in Williamsburg’s addressing those social issues that had long been avoided. Since the first day that Colonial Williamsburg opened, many visitors had questioned the absence of African-Americans and the poor whites who were a majority of the population of the original town. Due to the strong segregationist attitude that continued to persist in Virginia, the Foundation had been reluctant to confront this issue. Nevertheless, as Colonial Williamsburg grew in national prominence and recognition, and with the developing changes in attitudes towards race and women, the Foundation began making changes in programs, scripting, interpreting, and directions in research.

In 1985, the Foundation published *Teaching History and Colonial Williamsburg* which outlined the new directions to be taken over the next ten years. Though the underlying message of patriotism still remained, the Foundation reorganized Williamsburg’s approach to history
focusing on the concept of Ahistory with a theme. It believed that establishing a basic theme would give guidance to all other endeavors.

A theme helps educational planners write coherent storylines, set priorities, and select sites and programs that make most effective use of the Foundation=s resources to achieve its mission. It gives the Foundation=s fund-raisers a packaged program to present to potential donors. (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Teaching 1)

The name given to Williamsburg’s theme in 1985 was ABecoming Americans. The purpose of this theme is to address questions concerning not just the lives of the Patriots who lived in Williamsburg but the origins of America. By utilizing the plural form AAmericans, the Foundation sought to address the cultural diversity that is unique to America recognizing the fact that being an American does not rely on conforming to a single definition or type of person. The new approach stressed that we are as much defined as Americans by our differences as by our similarities, but are all held together by a common bond based in an ideology. Part of this new program was to explain the development of these ideals and how they brought together diverse peoples. This theme focuses on two basic questions:

First, how did the colonists= experiences begin to diverge and differ from that of the mother country, and what Old World ways persisted in the New World?

Second, what was there in these new experiences that were distinctly American?

(Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Teaching viii)

Having decided on an overriding theme, the Foundation decided the best way to implement this new program was to break it down into four areas of concentration. The various sites would be categorized and their representative categories would determine the direction of
the interpretation therein. In terms of performance, the way that this theme was addressed resembles in some respects the stations in the church theater of the Middle Ages before those performances moved outside. Just as the audience moved from scene to scene in the church portraying a story from the Bible, the visitors at Williamsburg moved from building to building each of which tells its own story which in actuality was a part of the larger story of “Becoming American.” To do this, the Foundation determined that separate interpretive plans must be prepared for each exhibition building and craft shop to explain what part of the history of early American society visitors will encounter in each interpretive station (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Teaching 6).

Based on the types of exhibitions that already existed, four topics were created: Government, Work and Enterprise, Family and Community Life, and Cultural Life. The Teaching History guide justifies and explicates the purpose and focus of each of these topics and the various issues that would be addressed. The new social history approach was clearly reflected with the prevalent inclusion and interpretation of previously ignored peoples of Williamsburg. The inclusion of the topic Cultural Life was considered especially important due to ties with the mother country, England, which it represents. Though the colonies and England differed on political and economic fronts, cultural considerations seemed to transcend these issues.

When interpreters present the Becoming Americans theme in its political, social, and economical subplot, the storylines will emphasize the significant areas of divergence from English models. By contrast, their portrayal of cultural life in eighteenth-century Virginia will show that the colony strengthened its allegiance to British ideals in art, thought, and gentility at the same time that the American
experience was leading to important differences in other areas. (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, *Teaching* 13)

The Educational Planning Group was created to work with teams of interpreters, supervisors, historians, researchers, and other staff members to create interpretive plans for each of the sites including historical information, possible questions, and thematic direction reflecting the “Becoming Americans” theme. The over-all plan is divided into three areas of concentration: historical area exhibition sites, Carter=s Grove, and interpretive tours, programs, and presentations. Within each of these areas the specific sites or programs are divided among the four topics. For example, under the historical area exhibition sites the Governor=s Palace falls under the topic of government, the Miller falls under the topic of Enterprise and Work, the public gaol falls under the topic of Family and Community, and the Masonic Lodge falls under the topic of Cultural Life. An example of an interpretive plan for a specific site reads as follows:

**Governors Palace (1768 В 1770)**

**TOPICS:** the governor=s responsibilities and authority; Governor Botetourt and his household staff, hierarchy, identities, functions; relations between and among masters and servants; the building, its architecture, history, and uses of its spaces; the governor as social and cultural leader; Botetourt=s official and personal English ties; the fate of royal governance in Virginia; visitors to and guests at the Palace; furnishings and decorations; the gardens; symbols of royal authority; meals and balls as social ceremonies; the out buildings and grounds reflect household functions and hierarchies

**STORYLINE:** how and why the royal governor=s influence on Virginia politics and government weakened, the consequences this had for the conflict between
Assembly and crown, how and why royal governance ended in Virginia, the influences of royal governance in the state constitution of 1776. (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Teaching, 19)

For those working at the Governor’s Palace this was the extent of any formal type of scripting they were given. Much like the *scenario* for an Italian *Commedia dell’Arte* troupe, this synopsis is the basis from which the interpreters improvise their roles.

The analysis of Colonial Williamsburg readily demonstrates a paradox or contradiction inherent in these institutions. Though they insist that what they are doing is not performance or acting, their verbiage about themselves is rife with performance terminology disguised behind such words and phases as “storyline” or “interpretive plans” for scripts, “interpreters” for actors, and “interpretive station” for set. They are incapable of avoiding such references in these descriptions as sited above. As much as they wish to divorce themselves from being categorized as a form of theatre, they need the performance techniques of theatre to survive.

**Summary:**

Though it is clear that performance is an integral part of Colonial Williamsburg’s program, the Foundation considers these performances different, possibly above, mere stagecraft. Its attitude is summed up in the *Visitor=s Companion* for the week of December 10, 1990:

Character interpreters are not actors; they have no script. Every character is prepared to converse freely on a variety of topics from politics to childbearing. A visit with these character interpreters provides the opportunity to learn about the
past from the personal viewpoints of the people who lived it. It is a way for the visitor to talk with the past. (Handler, *New History*, 75)

Yet, to assume that interpreters are not actors because there is no formal script is based on a false premise. As stated, they are given *scenarios* which is similar to the sparse scripting given to *Commedia dell’Arte* actors. This attempt at distancing its interpreters from being categorized as mere actors may have been in reaction to the criticism that Colonial Williamsburg was nothing more than a ARepublican Disneyland.@ This criticism was based in part to the heavy patriotic themes of the early years and an antitheatrical sentiment that saw the performative elements inherent at the site as contrary to the historical expectations. The false belief that if it was too entertaining then it was not historical was the basis of the struggle that the founders had in establishing the direction that Colonial Williamsburg would take, and the difficulty in creating a balance between entertainment and education. Richard Handler observed that members of the Foundation:

wondered whether audiences are willing to be exposed to the harsh conditions of slavery, or whether a pleasant past is the only history that is marketable. In short, the Colonial Williamsburg we came to know was pervaded by a pervasive institutional identity crisis. Was it a ARepublican Disneyland@ or a Aliving history museum,@ a Amegaresort@ or a Aserious educational institution@?Bto ask the question with phrases that insiders used repeatedly. (24)

The founders of Colonial Williamsburg sought to rebuild this eighteenth century town in an attempt to bring alive a significant moment in time of the American story. Over its seventy-five year history, the story of the people and the events of that time have evolved with the changing considerations of the various aspects that comprise a society’s history. Since the
approach to history that was chosen was in the form of a living history museum, which inherently presumes a performative construct, the changes that have occurred are predominantly recognizable in the changes in the performances. Yet the resistance to acknowledging the performativity of the site as delegitimizing its historical accuracy by the Foundation has restricted its ability to fully engage the history on a living basis.

Colonial Williamsburg has been lauded as an uniquely American approach to historical research. Daniel Boorstin, an internationally respected historian from the University of Chicago, visited Colonial Williamsburg to see for himself if it was merely a kind of patriotic Disneyland® as many of his colleagues claimed, or a viable institution for the advancement of historical understanding. What he came away with was a perception he had not anticipated. Boorstin compares the vibrantly alive atmosphere of Colonial Williamsburg’s approach to history with that of the dead museums throughout Europe and accounts for the difference in the coming together of seemingly disparate, yet very American, institutions which created a very American answer to living history. For Williamsburg to exist, it needed to “combine the techniques of Hollywood, Madison Avenue, Wall Street and Schenectady with those of the universities, museums, and research centers” (Boorstin 3). This would mean the cooperation of “archeological precisionists, dramatic producers, advertisers and promoters” (3). That he includes allusions to Hollywood and dramatic producers further reinforces the idea of the existence of a performance paradox and the affect that performance has on the difference between history as seen in a traditional museum with dioramas and glass cases, and that at the living history sites. This attitude parallels the sentiments ascribed to in the definition of outdoor historical drama as a “dramatic form of storytelling, an examination of recorded events that reinforces the value of preserving cultural, political and social history.”
Boorstin believes that this approach to history lies in the relationship that Americans have with their history stating that Colonial Williamsburg came to seem to me a symbol of what distinguishes our American attitude to our national past compared to people in other parts of the world (Boorstin 1). What really differentiates an American approach to history from a European approach is that Americans do not look at their past as a bygone age but as a part of the present. This may be due in part to the relative youth of this country. The past for Americans is not something that is over but the beginning of a story that still is being told. When visiting Colonial Williamsburg, the past depicted is not lost; it is a picture of yesterday that is readily seen today. Boorstin states:

The great man and the great works of our national history seem to us great precisely because they are still alive. . . We view our national history and the facts justify us as a single broad stream, the unbroken living current of an American Way of Life, not as a miscellaneous series of great epochs. Partly for this reason we lean more heavily on our past than on our political ideology as a resource for discovering our present, and for defining our ideals. (Boorstin 5)

Though this might be an accurate analogy of an American perception of the national history, Colonial Williamsburg claims to be an unique approach to history from that of its European counterparts by totally ignoring the earlier forms of living museums that have existed since the late 1900s. This omission also can be recognized in the histories written about the development of Colonial Williamsburg.

As stated earlier, Arthur Hazelius is considered the father the open-air museum with his Skansen. Even his motto, Aknow yourself by knowing the past, embodies the same intent as Colonial Williamsburg=s motto Athat the future may learn from the past. These earlier
examples would not have been unknown to American historians since various European groups sent examples of their work in the form of dioramas for exhibition at such events as the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. With this in mind it is hard to believe that the historians, archeologists, architects, and anthropologists were unaware of what their colleagues in Europe were doing. Thus one can only conclude that by omitting any reference to these earlier endeavors, those involved with the publicity of Colonial Williamsburg continue to perpetuate the myth of their site as an unique approach to history. What is singular to Colonial Williamsburg is its lasting power, its ability to change with times, and the grand scale of this project in comparison to its imitators and progenitors.

Regardless of the fact that the Foundation sets Williamsburg apart from earlier examples of living history museums, its denial of its relationship with theatre remains problematic to its growth. As defined by Kirby and Schechner, the constructs of the daily routine at Williamsburg can be readily considered within the acting continuum and the realms of performance. This antitheatrical stance will be explored further in the conclusion in relation to the other manifestations of performing history.

Plimoth Plantation

By the time Plimoth Plantation opened its first reconstructed house in 1949, Colonial Williamsburg had been setting the precedent for large scale living history museums for eighteen years. The success at Colonial Williamsburg encouraged the reconstruction of other historical sites across the United States such as Plimoth Plantation in Plymouth Massachusetts. In 1945, Harry Hornblower convinced the Pilgrim Society that Plymouth, as one of the first English
settlements in the United States, was worthy of reconstruction. The Pilgrim Society already had been instrumental in restoring several seventeenth-century houses in downtown Plymouth. Like Colonial Williamsburg, Plimoth Plantation has continually updated its narratives that can be seen through its changes in performances reflecting the growth of information and understandings of the past. It also began with tour guides dressed in period costumes who took the visitors from house to house. Eventually, this approach would be changed supplanting the guides with interpreters. Today, the interpreters attempt to create a living seventeenth-century colonial village. Visitors may walk through the streets, into homes, around the fields, pet the animals, smell the herbs, and sit and chat with inhabitants in the shade of a tree on a hot summer afternoon.

Hornblower’s inspiration had come from Colonel William Bradford’s history Our Plimoth Plantation. Bradford was the second Governor of Plymouth in 1627. To this end, Hornblower convinced his father, Ralph Hornblower, to donate twenty thousand dollars toward reconstruction of the site. As fund-raising proceeded, the scope of the project became such that the Pilgrim Society decided to create an independent corporation. Plimoth Plantation was incorporated in 1947. When a permanent site was sought, Harry’s grandmother, Hattie Hornblower, donated part of her property to the project. In all, nineteen houses were planned for reconstruction based on the description of the village given by Governor William Bradford. The bylaws state:

Plimoth Plantation, Inc. was incorporated on October 2, 1947 with the goal as a memorial to the Pilgrim Fathers . . . [to further] the historical education of the public with respect to the struggles of the early settlers in the Town of Plymouth,
with the expansion of that settlement and the influence of the Pilgrim Fathers throughout the world. (Baker 8)

Later with the creation of a Board of Trustees the purpose was expanded to:

foster public understanding of the Pilgrims of Plymouth whose courage, faith and devotion to freedom has given inspiration to the many other pilgrims who have followed them to a new life in the New World. (Baker 12)

The project sought to recreate the Plimoth Plantation of 1627, seven years after the first landing, when the security of the settlement was relatively assured. Hornblower and his supporters chose this date due to the extensive documentation available, and because at that time expansion beyond the original settlement had only just begun. The corporation chose the spelling Plimoth because that was how the name appeared in Governor Bradford’s writings. Thus, Plimoth Plantation would be readily differentiated from the modern town of Plymouth.

In 1627, over 200 people lived in and around the settlement. The modern interpreters seek only to represent about 30 of the better known original inhabitants. By limiting the scope of the performances, the board is able to keep overhead costs down and allow for richer concentration on the individual performances. Each year the interpreters return to Plimoth Plantation in late March to recreate the events of 1627 from March through November as described in seventeenth-century documents. These events are recreated in the order in which these events occurred. Specific events for the season long scenario include the arrival of representatives from the Dutch company that sponsored their initial voyage, dealings with the Natives in the area, and any holiday celebrations that may occur during the season. Interpreters also enact births, marriages, and deaths. To maintain “authenticity,” with the beginning of each new season in March, the returning interpreters are instructed not to discuss events from 1627
that have not yet occurred in the present season, but which they had performed by the close of the previous season.

Beginning modestly in 1949, a recreation of an original 1627 plantation house, appropriately named the First House, opened to the public. The Fort/Meeting House, erected down the street from the First House, opened in 1953. Both were located in modern downtown Plymouth and were the test cases for the possibility of creating a larger permanent site outside of town. They quickly became popular attractions, encouraging Hornblower and his planners to move ahead with finding a location for a site upon which to build subsequent homes.

Construction of the site on the land donated by Hattie Hornblower began on May 4, 1957. This land is several miles from the original site since that site is currently occupied by the city cemetery in downtown Plymouth.

To further commemorate the historical significance of the settlement, Plimoth Plantation governors planned to build a replica of the Mayflower to be located at the docks downtown. Unbeknownst to them, Warwick Carlton, a public relations man in England, had dreamed of creating a replica of the Mayflower and sailing it to America in commemoration of the stronger ties between England and America after WWII (Baker 13). With plans in hand, he approached the governors with the offer of a partnership in recreating this famous ship. The governors accepted, and in 1955, the construction of the Mayflower II was begun in Devonshire, England. The Mayflower II was launched on September 22, 1956 and set sail on April 29, 1957. On June 12, 1957, she crossed Cape Cod and landed in Plymouth, Massachusetts where she is currently docked and open to the public. Before permanently docking there, however, Mayflower II toured the east coast from New York to Miami for a year. In 1992, Mayflower II was renovated
to make it seaworthy to take a four month tour to Florida. It again set sail down the coast in 1995 to commemorate the 375th anniversary of the original trip.

Like officials at Colonial Williamsburg, the governors of Plimoth Plantation have continually revised the site’s approach and appearance so as to attain as authentic a replica of the original settlement as possible. In theatrical terms, there restaged their performance of history. In the early years, visitors could see homes painstakingly replicated, decorated with many original implements. The guides took visitors to the various homes where they would see mannequins dressed as pilgrims in starched white collars and pilgrim hats inhabiting slatboard houses with brick fireplaces and neatly trimmed gardens.

It was the museum=s goal initially to perpetuate the romantic image of the Pilgrims, stressing the popular, pious image of them as hard-working, ingenious and reverent pioneers whose stalwart ways and collective courage made them the inspiration for all that was good in America. (Baker 26)

This image reflected the standard Pilgrim Story that is told to every school child complete with Thanksgiving, turkey, and Indians. Like early Williamsburg, the tour guides dressed in period costumes would narrate this history, solely in third-person. The approach presented an overly sanitized, neat and tidy approach to representing the past, a criticism also launched at Colonial Williamsburg. Thus the nostalgic myth of the pilgrims was perpetuated through its performance of the past. It would be another twenty years before this image at Plimoth Plantation would be reconsidered. That historical reconsideration also began the inclusion of first-person narrative as interpreters fully stepped into representing the early Pilgrims. Hence, like Williamsburg, new historical interpretation was achieved by performance techniques carried out by performers, who still denied that they were performing.
The rise of social history in the 1960s also changed the focus of interpretation at the Plimoth Plantation. Unlike Colonial Williamsburg, Plimoth Plantation did not have as great a political mystique nor as diverse a population attached to it, making a shift in focus less difficult in terms of visitor acceptance of the changes. Focus shifted from the traditional mythology surrounding the pilgrims to attempts to recreate historical conditions. The new staff agreed with this change in focus feeling that being able to use the reproductions in the recreated sites was more important than interpreting the “Pilgrim Story” and displaying original artifacts (Baker 19).

In 1967, four separate exhibits were planned reflecting four developmental phases of Plimoth from its founding to its becoming a part of the Massachusetts Bay Company in 1692. When the projected costs of this plan exceeded eight million dollars, the board soon realized the impossibility of such a project. A new master plan was finally enacted in 1969 with the focus on creating a living history museum. The goal became to create a single comprehensive exhibit of several homes replacing the individual exhibits. James Deetz, an archeologist and assistant director of the Plantation declared:

To be Alive, a museum is not simply operating with someone spinning in the corner or splitting shingles in the yard. A live museum should convey the sense of a different reality—the reality of another time. (quoted in Baker 21)

This belief requires a true “performance” of the past. The interpreters are not just craftsmen demonstrating a craft but using the craft as a means of living in the historical moment, bringing it alive. The modified Plimoth exhibit that emerged contrasted greatly with the previous image:

Labels, antiques, displays and mannequins (except in the Fort/Meetinghouse) had vanished. The houses appeared bare and spartan. Kitchen gardens full of vegetables replaced the herb gardens, the split-rail fences which were proving
ineffectual in preventing newly-acquired sheep and chickens from pillaging household plots were replaced by animal-proof board fences. The familiar presentation of the Pilgrim Story had been superseded by something called “living history.” (Baker 22)

The starched collars and impractical hats were replaced with more realistic clothing; dirt, rips, and floppy hats included. One of the most significant changes was the replacement of the antiques that furnished the houses with modern replicas based on the archaeological finds. Replicas allowed visitors to touch the objects, sit on the chairs and beds, and feel the heat from working fireplaces without the standard velvet ropes separating them from the exhibit.

This new look had its detractors as well as supporters. Some asserted it was a hippy version of the Pilgrims. Many considered the changes to be near traitorous to the idealism that the Pilgrims were supposed to inspire in the hearts of all good Americans. One critic demanded get rid of the >realism= so called, and give people some ideals to live up to. Clear out the radicals in command and get some 100% Americans (Baker 22). Clearly, nostalgia not history was what some visitors preferred. The dissenters were in the minority, though. Most of the visitors felt that the new approach humanized the Pilgrims eliminating the starched saintliness associated with them.

In 1978, the board of trustees revised the interpretation program by instituting the idea of first person narrative. Though many of the interpreters such as Martin, who portrayed Miles Standish from 1965-1981, had been doing a form of first person interpretation, his performance was not the norm. With the institution of the new program, interpreters were given the biographies of thirty colonists who lived at Plimoth Plantation in 1627. The official description and goal for the interpreters reads:
Clothed in period fashions and speaking in the accents of their character=s place of origin, museum staff=interpreters take on the identities of the original inhabitants of the colony. Together, these first person roles replicate the social and cultural life of a real human community. (Richard)

James Deetz, who assisted in the establishment of the interpretation program at Plimoth Plantation, asserts that first person interpretation:

requires that interpreters keep actively busy at all of the tasks that life in the community required in the past. Interpreters actually build houses and outbuildings as an interpretive activity . . . they cook food, and even eat it in period fashion. They often get dirty and tousled in their work in the fields and houselots, but the sense of reality is truly impressive. It is significant that demonstrations do not work in this context. . . . Much better to involve the interpreters in productive activities when needed. It is much more faithful to the real world as it was, since early Americans did not demonstrate crafts in their houses. (quoted in Handler and Saxton, “Dyssimulation” 244)

With the advent of the first person interpretation program, the site was divided into past and present. Today, visitors enter the complex through the modern buildings of the visitor center and gift shops, then proceeds to the path that will take them out of the present into the recreated past. Visitors have the choice of entering the village through the gates off the fields or through the fort. The fort provides an overview of the village from its second floor gun ports. The site consists of 15 homes, outbuildings, a palisade and fort. As visitors enter the village, they are met by costumed interpreters who have taken on the roles of original colonists. Visitors are free to enter the homes and gardens of the inhabitants and discuss aspects of daily life in 1627 Plimoth.
Nearby is a recreation of Hobbamock’s homesite, a summer camp of some of the Wampanoag People.

As part of the preparation for each new season, which begins on March 1 and runs through November 31, the interpretation directors seek performers that closely resemble the settlers physically and in personality based on Governor Bradford’s history and other contemporary accounts. In theatrical terms, they are casting to type. The new performers have little rehearsal time to work on any acting techniques but are trained in the language and history of the period. They are given a biography of the person they will become for the next eight months. Though written by the research staff, these biographies are styled after seventeenth-century writing. As an example, the biography of Phineas Pratt states that:

P. Pratt is a man of Character; he cannot Lie, nor swear, nor suffer one heard B Quicker Master P. would unscabbard his temper a= his sword than tolerate a falsehood or an disembilating man. Nor ought he, by his own Code of Good Word and Valient Deeds. One does not find him continually Defending his or others verity, however, for the same disposition which causeth him to believe in his own Truth Telling, causeth him to trust the truth of Others B unless he find ample cause to Doubt . . .He has lived as close to the red men B friends & goes B as anie English Man & accepted B nay, even adopted his own ways, their customs & believes B but his animated telling of the sagacities & civilities of The Beaver causes some of the more canny & doubtful of the community to wince at AFinyuz=s@ acceptance of what they deem heathan apocrypha. (Schechner 86)
This description of Pratt is reminiscent of the character descriptions found in *Commedia dell’Arte* and other forms of improvisation. It is also similar to the scenarios created for the interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg.

Harry Hornblower knew from the start that somehow the Native Americans that the pilgrims encountered would have to be represented. Archeological digs revealed that the region had been inhabited by Native Americans for thousand years prior to the arrival of the Pilgrims. Initially a bark covered lodge was built at one end of the village. A more appropriate site for the Native Americans was created behind the Brewster House down the river, and the less authentic bark homes were replaced with Wetus, native houses covered with reed mats. It has been relocated a second time away from the settlement and with access to the Eel River, and named Hobbamock’s Homesite. Hobbamock, of the Wampanoag tribe, was a counselor to Chief Massasoit who was instrumental in the Pilgrim’s survival during their first winter at Plimoth. Though Hobbamock was a real person and is believed to have had a semi-permanent camp nearby, the reconstruction is not an actual recreation since such information is unavailable. It is, rather, a site that resembles what his camp may have looked like. At the site are two Wetus, a cooking area, canoes under construction, and a garden.

The essential difference between Hobbamock’s Homesite and the Plantation is in the performance of the interpreters. Actual Wampanoags man the site. They are not Aplaying® Indians, nor are they attempting to portray historical figures. They are themselves telling the stories of the past and the present in this historically recreated site. As the guide books state:

The interpreters in Hobbamock’s Homesite will speak to you in modern 20th-century English. They will explain what is known about Wampanoag history and culture of the 17th-century and about the many myths and misconceptions about
the Wampanoag. Native American staff wear clothing of the period while non-native interpretive guides wear uniforms. (Richard)

The Wampanoag site is separate from the plantation in terms of narrative and approaches to interpretation as well as through physical distance. Part of the reason for this separation is the difference in philosophy behind the Native American performers. To them, they are not interpreters, nor are they playing a role, but through their cultural appreciation of their own peoples’ history, they communicate the past to the present, sharing the stories of their ancestors with the visitors. In her article, First Nations/Native American Interpreters, Laura Peers has researched what she considers an uniquely non-western approach to historical representation and explained the theory behind this dynamic. The Native Americans who work at these sites bring with them not the telling of a dead past but the understanding of a living tradition to which they feel connected. When they express the belief that they are playing themselves, the First Nations peoples, they mean that they are expressing their contemporary identity as persons rooted in the heritage, using the past to validate the present and vice versa. "Playing ourselves" gives a whole new meaning to the idea of "living" history (Peers 48). For many Native Americans, it was only with this understanding toward their portrayals that they would accept positions at these sites.

Though many visitors may think of Plimoth Plantation as a restoration of the original colony, the site is actually a recreation. None of the buildings, artifacts, clothing, or even the location is original; they are modern recreations of what is believed to have existed. The local cemetery in modern downtown Plymouth, dating back to the late 1600s, has expanded over the years to include the original Pilgrim site precluding the board from building the recreation there. The location selected for the recreation is on the Eel River, two and a half miles from the original
site. Though these recreations give the site a sense of authenticity, true authenticity is impossibly elusive. Stephen Snow, who worked as an interpreter from 1984-1986, first playing Richard Warren, then Edward Winslow and finally Governor Bradford, problematizes the possibility of authenticity at sites such as Plimoth Plantation.

I am a paid impostor who has been trained to dress, walk, talk and think like an early seventeenth-century Englishman. . . we do our best to reconstruct regional dialects and seventeenth century speech patterns, but how can we possibly claim it=s authentic B they didn’t have tape recorders back in 1627!

(Snow, Performing 34)

Snow questions the possibility of historical authenticity at the site since the interpreters merely represent the original inhabitants, who, obviously, cannot be there to speak for themselves. Yet, Schechner sees in their performance what may actually be the most authentic aspect of the whole performance. Schechner observes:

In fact, the first-person interpretation technique has a kind of authenticity that the Plimoth architecture lacks. Nothing architectural survives from the original colony; the village has been totally re-created. But it is known who was there, and background information has been researched regarding individual inhabitants. Thus, while the buildings and furnishings are typical of the period, the people are actually from 1627 as much as good acting can make them so. (88)

Schechner’s phrase, “as much as good acting can make them so,” reveals the paradox of historical reenactment. Though the reenactments are attempting to be authentic, true authenticity is unattainable. Richard Handler in his article, A Quest for Authenticity, believes that the compromises and inherent anachronisms found at these sites preclude the possibility of being
totally authentic. Therefore, performance must pick up where history leaves off and this is dependent on good acting regardless if the performers are called interpreters or actors. Here again is a semantic issue since, according to Kirby, these interpreters readily fall within his continuum as categorized by simple acting stating that “the person does something to simulate, represent, impersonate and so forth.” The goal still remains the same, to recreate history instilling in the visitor as sense of having stepped back in time.

Conclusion

To what extent is authenticity a necessity in these living history museums? It may be the perception of authenticity that is more important than having in hand the actual tool used by Williamsburg’s Governor Botetourt or Plymouth’s John Alden. In any case, that tool would not be of any real use as an applicable example of colonial life because of its value as an antique artifact or its deterioration due to age. It could only be a show piece. It is through the reconstructed tools used by modern people portraying the inhabitants of Williamsburg or Pilgrims that visitors can experience the physicality of the age.

Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation have evolved into environments that reflect past peoples and events by allowing visitors to engage the historical environment. The key word is “reflect.” Even Plimoth Plantation is not a complete reconstruction of the original settlement. Of the 200 inhabitants of the site in 1627, only 30 are represented at the modern site. Thus Plimoth is attempting to capture a sense of time and place and not true authenticity. By approaching history through this reflection, this attitude allows for visitors to have a “hands-on” experience. No longer are they required to stare at carefully displayed artifacts or lifeless
dioramas as a means of understanding the past. The past is brought alive. The visitor is brought face-to-face with history, so to speak, whereby he or she can see and smell bread being cooked Colonial style instead of just looking at an oven from the period. This is as close to experiencing the past that the visitor can have without becoming an interpreter himself. It is an experience analogous to that of television audiences watching people very much like themselves experience the past through the television shows discussed later in this study.

I have touched upon the antitheatrical sentiments that these sites have towards an association with a theatrical perception. At these sites, there is a resistance to labeling the interpreters actors. The belief is that this would diminish the historical legitimacy of the site. I explore this attitude in the conclusion incorporating the PBS productions into the discourse.
CHAPTER 4
EXPERIMENTAL ARCHEOLOGY

Introduction

As stated in chapter one, Peter Stone defines four approaches to presenting the past. Though he acknowledges that there is confluence between these approaches, he believes that a true integration of them has not been achieved.

I and many of my colleagues believe that the presentation of the past in school curricula and in museum and site interpretations will benefit from a greater understanding of how the past is interpreted by archaeologists and/or indigenous peoples. (1)

To this end, two forms of archaeological interpretation programs have developed: archaeological sites as an interpretive program, and experimental archaeological opportunities. These experimental archaeological opportunities are diverse. For the professional, including archeology students, the classroom is taken outside to reconstructed habitats where they can use modern replicas of artifacts within an historical context. For the nonprofessional, there are sites that afford them the opportunity to live a past lifestyle, taking advantage of archeological research. This could either last for a weekend like Washburn-Norlands in Maine or become part of an alternative lifestyle for the long term like the Buckskinner. In both cases, archeology has played an important part in their ability to recreate the past for their own edification.

The first form focuses on making sites that are active archaeological digs open to the public. These sites serve a dual purpose of fact finding and education, and archaeologists at
these digs are asked to perform the dual role of archaeologist and interpreter. A major impetus behind the initiative toward public awareness has come from the U.S. government with the Archaeological Resources Protection Act and a National Strategy for Federal Archeology. The Archaeological Resources Protection Act was created in 1979 as a response to the vagueness of the 1906 Antiquities Act. Section 10C of the new act states that federal agencies under the auspices of the ARPA are required to establish public awareness about the program and the need to protect archaeological resources, and to submit an annual report to Congress on the progress and effectiveness of public awareness programs (National Trust).

An example of the enactment of these guidelines can be seen in the creation of The Public Interpretation Initiative at the Southeast Archeological Center of the National Park Service in Tallahassee Florida. John Jameson, director of the Center, states that the Initiative was also in response to the:

- growing public interest in archaeology, and out of the realization within the professional community that archeologists can no longer afford to be detached from the mechanisms and programs that attempt to communicate archeological information to the lay public. (John Jameson)

In 2004, Jameson outlined the ways that the Southeast program has met the provisions of the ARPA. His report details symposia and workshops sponsored by the center; training opportunities for interpreters, archaeologists, and program managers to work with the public; publications; and interpretive art projects in cooperation with the archeological digs in the region (John Jameson).

In 1990, Secretary of the Interior Manual Lujan issued AThe National Strategy for Federal Archeology. The purpose of the strategy was to enact a better guide toward the
preservation of archaeological sites as part of the Secretary’s duty to provide leadership and
guidance of the programs outlined in the Archaeological Resources Protection Act and the
National Historic Preservation Act. This strategy was updated in 1999 by Secretary Bruce
Babbitt who outlined four areas of focus:

- the preservation, protection and appropriate research on archaeological sites
- the curation and research use of archaeological collections and records
- the utilization and sharing of archaeological reports, data and research results
- the continued incorporation of public education and outreach activities in
  archeological projects. (National Parks)

The sites under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, such as the Southeast
Archeological Center, are open to the public. Visitors at these sites join tours led by one of the
archaeologists who explains the activities occurring at the site. At some sites there are various
pits that show the progression of exploration. The visitors are permitted to ask questions of the
guide and the working archaeologists. The important point is that these sites are not museums
but real archaeological digs. There have been several sites that have attempted this form of
historical research such as the digs at Annapolis and the prehistoric site at Lochmere, New
Hampshire.

Parker Potter wrote of his experience working at Annapolis from 1982-1987. He states
that the purpose of the program was to teach the archaeological evidence for the roots of
modern everyday life in a capitalist economy (Potter 36) by studying the development of
Annapolis’ history. This has been achieved by opening up the digs to the public and changing
the relationship of the public=s awareness of artifacts from collections viewed and interpreted in
a museum to an approach allowing the visitor to play a part in the interpretation of said artifact or
site. In essence, rather than bringing archaeology (or its finds) into the museums, bring the museum out to archaeology, out to the field. (37).

Ultimately the goal is to bring the real world experience of an archaeological dig to a wider audience and explain the significance of archeological work as relevant beyond just digging up the dead. Artifacts can be readily associated with the site and its historical context. In the past, especially in such popular sites as Egypt and Greece, digs were typically closed to visitors. When visitors were allowed, they were seen as nuisances that could potentially harm the work being done. Potter has used the Annapolis site as a means of changing these sentiments.

Archaeologists have argued that hands-on experience at archaeological sites has a greater impact on students’ understanding of history than knowledge gleaned from documents and books. A recent study by Indian archaeologist N. Dahiya suggests that:

those students who studied the past through an archaeological rather than a document-based approach did learn and retain the information and, at the same time, appeared to enjoy the work more. (Stone 24)

The educational possibilities at these sites are multi-leveled. There is a place for hand-on types and for casual observers who do not wish to delve into the trenches. These open sites allow for hypothesis testing of the creation and use of artifacts, living conditions, and survival techniques within an environment that simulates historical conditions yet is to a certain degree controlled. Based on these experimental understandings, many artifacts have been replicated from homes to boats.

One of the first attempts to create a usable full scale replicated artifact was by Thor Hyerdahl and his crew in 1947 who built a full scale replica of a native South American reed
boat known to have been used prior to A.C. E. 1100. They christened it the *Kon-Tiki*.
The purpose of building the boat was not as a museum piece; nor was it associated with any specific site. Hyerdahl hoped to prove that a boat from this era could sail from North America to the Polynesian Islands. The experiment was a success. Since then there have been numerous such experiments such as the building of a Viking ship to sail from Norway to Canada to retrace the route of Eric the Red. These experiments tested theories based on information from various sites and utilizing period tools. Hans-Ole Hansen also believed that the best way to gain understanding of ancient peoples was to attempt to walk in their shoes, metaphorically speaking.

In 1956, at the age of seventeen, he hand crafted a replica of a Stone Age house using Stone Age tools based on information from a local archeological dig at Troldebjerg, Denmark. When it was completed, he and several of his friends would live for short periods of time in the house (Hansen 15).

Later examples of experimental archeology tend to be more site-specific. Actual digs that incorporate experimentation with theoretical use of artifacts found at the site, readily differentiates these sites from theme parks even though they are open to the public. Stone ("Presenting the Past") agrees with this sentiment stating that such a site, evolving from local resources, would not carry the same conviction of environmental acceptability or appropriateness if it were built elsewhere (11). One example of such a site is Butser Farm. During the 1970's, building upon the work of Hansen, Peter Reynolds created the Butser Ancient Farm Research Project. Reynolds chose Butser Hill in England, the site of a Bronze Age Celtic farm, as his location for recreating an ancient working farm. Through careful archaeological research he was able to glean enough information to create what he believed to be relatively authentic buildings. Reynolds states:
In reality it is an open-air scientific research laboratory, unique in world archaeology. The purpose is to explore all the aspects of such a farm, the structures and processes, the plant cultivation and animal husbandry, and to consider not only how each particular aspect itself may operate but also how all the aspects integrate together. (17)

Though for a short time in 1976, Butser Farm was open to the general public. Eventually, Reynolds closed the site due to the damage caused by visitors. From then on select researchers were allowed at the site. Reynolds’s recreation included three roundhouses and five fields for crops, along with sheep and cattle that had been bred to resemble their ancient counterparts. As part of the experiment, Reynolds and his staff periodically lived at the site to understand the challenges that faced the original Celtic farmers. Researchers used replicas of tools ancient farmers used, under conditions those farmers would have experienced. Recently, Butser Farm has been reopened to tours as an educational facility. The farm currently offers themed weekends to the general public such as “Fire and Fleece,” demonstrations on how people from this era kept warm; and “Food and Drink,” methodologies of Roman cooking and tasting. The theme weekends allow participants a hands-on experience focusing on various aspects of how ancient peoples may have lived. Most of these weekends strictly focus on the subject at hand and do not require the participant to fully immerse themselves in the time period. Butser Farm does offer a weekend called “Experimental Archeology in Action” which allows the participant to experience full immersion in the site by giving them the opportunity to live in the reconstructed homes for the weekend. For these weekends, a guide lives with the participants to assist with the necessities of living as the ancient people might have.
Through Reynolds’s work new understanding of how people in Iron Age Britain lived and the viability of these structures has emerged. Like similar sites, discussed later in this chapter, recreating the environment within which the artifacts may have been used takes historical investigation to previously uncharted waters. Reynolds and others give the public the opportunity to perform the lives of these ancient peoples, to walk in their shoes, replicated shoes.

Experimental archaeological sites allow visitors to experience history by living it for an extended period of time. These sites are not digs but recreated environments based on information from archaeological finds and may or may not be located at the original historical site. Archeologist James Mathieu in his book, *Experimental Archeology*, defines such sites as:

> the context of a controllable imitative experiment to replicate past phenomena (from objects to systems) in order to generate and test hypotheses to prove or enhance analogies for archaeological interpretations. (1)

Unlike Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation, sites devoted to experimental archeology have little or no ancillary commercial ends. The participants at these sites are not interpreters but actually commit to living at the site under conditions as close as possible to the way the original inhabitants may have lived. Yet, like interpreters, most participants go through a training period to prepare them for the experience.

Mathieu describes four types of replication involved in experimental archeological endeavors: object, behavioral, process, and system. These types can occur separately or concurrently during the experiments. Archaeologists merely may wish to understand the way an object was used, or to integrate objects into a larger understanding of a system found in full scale sites. At this point, I wish to acknowledge the relevance these types of experimentations would have to ethnography or ethnoarchaeology. As Mathieu states:
Since this system involves such a high level of replicative activity, it is usually only pursued through research which is normally referred to as *ethnography* or *ethnoarchaeology*. . . . However, if one considers that the purpose of experimental archaeology is to generate analogies to be used in archaeological interpretation, then it is probably more appropriate for experimental archaeology to just acknowledge that ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological observations are also good sources of analogies, rather than to cast them as examples of experimental research. (6)

For the purpose of this study, however, I am not exploring the ethnographical aspects inherent in these experiments. Attempting to include those aspects would balloon this study beyond manageable bounds. The examples of archaeological experiments that I will be discussing primarily focus on system replication, which involves the reproduction of numerous processes in what is most easily thought of as a living system@ (Mathieu 6). It is this replication technique that most readily incorporates aspects of performance with the inclusion of props (replicated objects), a set (replicated buildings), and character (replicated behavior). The major performance aspect that is missing is an audience. In chapter five it will be seen that productions like *The Frontier House* and *Colonial House*, combine some of the living history aspects of Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation with the controlled living conditions of the archeological experiment, both aspects geared to adding a popular audience through reality TV constructs into the equation.
On Butser Farm, Reynolds and his staff recreated the living conditions of Iron Age peoples in Britain yet stopped just short of actually attempting to live for any extended period of time under these conditions. At the time Reynolds was conducting his experiments, Errett Callahan was replicating an ancient environment in Virginia in which volunteers would attempt to live for an extended period of time. Callahan believed that an understanding of ancient living could only be gained if the experiment was carried on over at least “a two week period” and perhaps as long as “a full year cycle” (Anderson, *Time* 124). The idea of the extended period of time would allow for the chance of greater insights into the living patterns of ancient people. Callahan’s Pamunkey Project, located on the Pamunkey River in eastern Virginia, recreated a Middle Woodland period Native American village as it would have been ca. 1000 A.C.E. The Project became the model for this type of long term approach to experimental archaeology.

As with any historical recreation, the volunteers at the Pamunkey Project went through an extensive training program learning the use of tools, food preparation, and shelter building. Callahan sought to concentrate on certain basic aspects of material life such as food, clothing, and shelter, and hope to surmise an understanding of the more subtle aspects of life, such as social behavior and daily patterns of work and play® (Anderson, *Time* 124). The experiment was conducted through the summers of 1975 and 1976 as the volunteers attempted to emulate the living conditions of the Woodland Indians who had inhabited land in what is now Hanover County, Virginia. In his papers on the experiment Callahan outlines the goals and purpose of the project:
Their goal through the use of primitive technology was to put to test various theories concerning efficacy of this technology, gain new understandings, and promote greater appreciation for how these people lived. The entire reconstruction was based on extensive archeological information. (Callahan iv)

With these goals in mind, Callahan=s volunteers lived in the village for a month each summer. Though some on-the-spot note taking was involved, most documentation about the experience was done in retrospect. Throughout their stay in the village, volunteers dressed, ate, and slept as the Woodland Indians were thought to have done. Their performance incorporated the ways this different lifestyle affected their interrelationships with their fellow volunteers. Though considering this activity a performance might seem a stretch, their actions do fall under the definition of a performance and within Kirby’s continuum as simple acting since they are “doing something to simulate, represent, impersonate” someone else. At the same time, though, the group was not to have the delusion that it had been transported back in time.

We had no interest whatsoever in simply Aplaying Indian@ or Asurvival,@ as some have accused us. Yes, we did live like Indians, and yes, we did manage to survive, and rather well, at that, under Indianlike condition. But we were careful not allow ourselves to think that we really were living in the past or that we were . . . . resurrecting the past. (Anderson, Time 124)

The volunteers through their various papers discussed the wealth of findings they gathered from the experiment. For instance, Robert Lawrence focused on the making of lithic tools and their patterns of wear; James Raup experienced the difficulties associated with bows and stone-tipped arrows, and gained new insights about efficiency ratios and breakage patterns. Food preparation obviously was another important aspect of life at Pamunkey. Meals took an
average of 4.4 hours to prepare. Volunteers also learned the importance of the durability of certain kinds of wood over others. This was discovered mostly through trial and error, a rough learning experience since error caused the demise of their shelter. Constance Knapp studied basic activities, particularly gathering. She noted:

The biotic ecosystem of which we became an integral part played an active, major role in our own adaptation and settlement pattern. This in turn gave us vivid insights into similar influence in the past. (Callahan 7)

Other insights, such as the interrelationship between lithic technology and all other technologies, were gained. This can be seen by the fact that trapping was our most productive meat-getting technology in terms of man-hours of lithic tool use input as balanced against caloric returns (Callahan 7). Thus the decision to make a particular tool and the time it would take to make it would be weighed against the amount of food it would bring to the group. This understanding of interrelationships allowed the researchers to gain new insights into the use of the tools in the community, Callahan states that from our calculations, we were also able to differentiate between standing and total artifact inventories per working adult living our life-style in an environment similar to ours (8).

Though the project only lasted for a month in each of two successive summers, the recorded experiences of the volunteers encouraged other such archeological experiments. For example, Horreus de Haas, one of the participants of the Pamunkey Project and a Dutch biologist, conducted his own experiment in Holland on a twenty-five acre swamp land, referred to in the Dutch as a polder. This experiment, the Polder Project, was based on the archeological information about the Stone Age culture that existed in that region. The Polder experiment, in time, influenced the BBC television series “Living in the Past” discussed in the next chapter.
Neither the Pamunkey nor the Polder Project sought to introduce the general public to living within a recreated historical environment. For this, the Buckskinners and The Washburn-Norlands Farm are the next step in this study.

Buckskinners

Introduction

The second kind of experimental archeology this study focuses on is the Buckskinners. They are also referred to as long hunters, *coureurs de bois*, *voyageurs*, frontier settlers, and mountain men (Anderson, *Time* 137). According to the Mid America Buckskinners:

Buckskinning is the reliving of the times between 1700 and 1840. We recreate the common gatherings, food games, and everyday life of times gone by. There are several divisions in the geographical areas and in the authenticity of the groups ranging from “If you can’t see it, it’s okay”, to museum quality replicas only. (*Mid American*)

Though similar in intent to the goals of the Pamunkey Project, those involved with the Buckskinning lifestyle do not tend to be professional archeologists or even historians. They fall more under the category of weekend warriors. Yet, they are also very dedicated to fully immersing themselves into the time period during their gatherings, referred to as Rendezvous. The Mid American Buckskinners further state:

Buckskinning offers a chance to relive an earlier period of our history. At it’s [sic] best, it gives a feeling of reality that is rarely part of reenacting. It’s done for
the participants, not for an audience. In fact the public is usually excluded. This makes it much easier to feel you are really in the period you are portraying.

It is this lack of an audience that qualifies them under my consideration of being a kind of experimental archeology yet still within the realm of performance. They go to great lengths to replicate as authentically as possible the clothing, guns (many of the guns used are actually from the time period), and any other accoutrements such as bags, tents, and cooking utensils.

Understanding of the archeological research from this time period is imperative toward achieving the level of authenticity they desire. The Buckskinner, which Jay Anderson refers to as Black Power enactors, are an off shoot of a much older organization: the National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association.

**NMLRA**

In 1930, a debate on the accuracy of the muzzle-loading rifle versus a modern rifle ensued at the YMCA in Portsmouth, Ohio during a meeting of the rifle and revolver club. To resolve this debate, Oscar Smith, the group’s secretary, suggested that there be a match. Seventy riflemen showed up with their guns, the oldest dating back to 1880 which was shot by the man who built it, Bill Large. With the success of this match, a second match was scheduled for the following year. By 1933, the gathering had grown to include 260 contestants and attracted more than 2000 spectators (Anderson, *Time* 136). That same year, the National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association was created. According to their mission statement:

The National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association exists to promote, support, nurture, and preserve NMLRA’s and our nation's rich historical heritage in the
sport of muzzleloading through recreational, educational, historical, and cultural venues such as match competition, hunting, gun making and safety, historical re-enactments, exhibits, museums, libraries, and other related programs. (NMLRA)

They are dedicated to:

The understanding of, and the ability in, marksmanship with early American muzzleloading firearms.

Match promotion for the purpose of advancing fine accuracy with these arms and the establishment of standard practices for competition.

The recognition and support for the continuing and growing interest in the added challenge of hunting with a muzzleloading firearm.

Greater safety with all firearms, especially with muzzleloading rifles, pistols, and shotguns.

The collecting, preservation, and recreation of antique firearms and related accoutrements, and the recognition of the value of living history re-enactments.

(NMLRA)

How these sentiments are expressed by their more than 25,000 members differs. Three basic groups have developed as part of the NMLRA: those that focus solely on the rifles for target shooting and hunting, those only interested in the rifles as part of the Civil War experience, and those that incorporate a recreation of the earlier furtrapper lifestyle with the rifles including clothing and all the accoutrements. It is this third group that I will focus on as an example of experimental archeology.
The third group diverged early as they began setting up “primitive” camps at the rifle matches and calling themselves “buckskinning” (due to the buckskin clothing they would wear). Though authenticity was lacking at first, this improved over time. Eventually the Buckskinners began holding their own matches which required all who attended to be in authentic clothing. These grew into weeklong gatherings that they refer to as Rendezvous.

The Rendezvous is a gathering of Buckskinners that emulates the way Rocky Mountain fur traders and dealers came together to trade, get supplies, and generally have a good time. Originally, the early fur trappers, referred to as Mountain Men or Mountaineers, of the American West in the early 1800s would bring their pelts from the Rocky Mountains back to St. Louis, Missouri to sell and buy supplies. This was a long and arduous trek. In 1825, traders, who bought the pelts from the Mountain Men, struck upon the idea that they could make more money if they took the goods to the Mountain Men and brought back the pelts themselves. This pleased the Mountain Men, who preferred the solitary life of the frontier and did not care for the long trip to St. Louis (Rocky Mountain).

Though still sponsored and sanctioned by the NMLRA and requiring membership in that organization to attend, the Rendezvous is separate from the rifle matches. To attend one must dress the part and follow the rules of that particular Rendezvous. Recently Rendezvous independent of the NMLRA have been organized, but each still insists on historical accuracy. These gatherings typically last ten days and are typically not open to the general public out of “costume.” Some, though, do have a day or two open for visitors.
Buckskinners have a variety of ways that they participate in the reenactments allowing for varying levels of involvement and expression. The hierarchy runs from Flatlander to Pilgrim to Buckskinners. The Flatlanders are comprised of the rare visitor or first-timers to the Rendezvous. Those Flatlanders and other interested parties whose interest has been peeked might try their hand at being a Buckskinner. At this novice stage they are referred to as Pilgrims. Pilgrims tend to be given greater leeway in maintaining historical accuracy as they learn the ropes. Those that choose to take this “hobby” on as a lifestyle are the Buckskinners. True Buckskinners take their interest in this era very seriously whether at a Rendezvous or at home. They take great offence at having their endeavors denigrated to hobby status. The advanced Buckskinners sometimes take on specialties such as Historical Archeologist, a Re-enactor, or a Living Historian (*Mid America*). Not all Buckskinners are attempting to recreate the same persona or stereotypical fur trapper, if such a thing actually existed. There are different personas that can be focused upon: an eighteenth-century longhunter, an eighteenth-century farmer, or a nineteenth-century trapper. This takes their activities even further into the realm of performance as they expand their choice of characters to portray and interact from the point of view of these characters. Though I am not suggesting that acting training become a part of the rites of passage for Buckskinners, acknowledging the performativity of these groups and the advantages of understanding the performance techniques within the construction of the television shows could have been an asset since I assert that the dynamics of these forms of experimental archaeology have been influential on those productions. I will address this concern further in the next chapter. For now I merely am pointing out the pervasive performative constructs that can be found in the least obvious places which further heighten the paradox as mentioned earlier.
One of the larger Rendezvous is the Rocky Mountain National Rendezvous. On their website, they state clearly what they expect of the participants whatever persona is being considered:

**Camp Rules**

1. All visible clothing and gear must be pre-1840! (This applies to children as well as adults.)
2. Participants must be in suitable pre-1840 attire when entering camp.
3. Keep plastic water jugs and coolers covered at all times. When hauling water or ice to your camp, keep non-period containers covered.
4. Vehicles will be allowed in camp for loading and unloading only.
5. There is a two-hour unloading time, at the end of which your vehicle must be removed from camp.
6. Park in the designated parking area. Vehicles parked in unauthorized areas will be towed at owner’s expense.
7. Parents are legally and financially responsible for the actions of their children.
8. Pets must be on a leash and under control at all times.
9. Cannons are allowed at the discretion of the Booshway. Please check before you leave home.
10. No loaded firearms in camp
11. Place trash in designated area. Bring your own trash bags.
12. No chain saws.
13. Do not cut live trees.

14. Remove and preserve sod from your fire pit. Replace it when you leave.

15. Campfires must not be left unattended.

16. You must have a period container of water (at least 3 gallons) and a shovel near your campfire.

17. No fighting. This includes domestic disturbances.

18. All Local, State and Federal laws regarding sale or consumption of alcohol apply in camp. *(Rocky Mountain)*

   Camp rules will not “abide modern sunglasses; T-shirts; plastic rain gear; bikini or halter tops; Tennis shoes; shower shoes; sandals; logger boots; pack boots; cowboy boots (round-toed Wellington boots and high-button shoes are acceptable); bathing suits; blue jeans; dusters; cowboy hats; black powder cartridge rifles: black powder revolvers (except Paterson models): other "cowboy" attire such as gunfighter, gambler or dance hall outfits; Coleman or electric lanterns; flashlights; metal or plastic camp furniture, etc” *(Rocky Mountain).*

   Trading is as important a part of these gatherings as it was for the early furtrappers. Though the barter system is involved, twentieth-century money is also accepted. This is about the only historical exception allowed. At the Rocky Mountain National Rendezvous, the rules for trading are as stringent as attending.

**Trade Rules**

1. All trade goods must be Pre-1840!
2. The Booshway or the appointed Trade Committee has final authority over all disputes involving trade goods. The burden of proof is on the trader. Trade Committee decisions are final.

3. All furs and animal parts for sale must comply with local, State and Federal laws. The individual trader is responsible for the legality of his trade goods.

4. No plastic in sight. This includes blister packs, styrofoam, blanket wraps, gun parts, candy containers, etc.

5. No sticky tags.

6. No silver and turquoise mixed jewelry. Keep jewelry to the style of the era.

7. Books, magazines, patterns, original works of art and limited edition prints must pertain to the pre-1840 fur trade era.

8. All guns for sale must be pre-1840. No in-line or plastic stocked rifles.

9. All trading must be done in camp. No tailgate set-ups will be allowed in the parking area.

10. All trading must be done from pre-1840 structures, except blanket traders. (Rocky Mountain)

Rendezvous that allow Flatlanders will usually have a performance of an historical reenactment such as Marquette and Jolliet meeting with the chief of an Illini village. Other sites have activities or reenactments that focus on their specific history such as are offered at the White Oak fur post in Minnesota operated by an interpreter portraying Jean Baptist, an early owner of the post. White Oak also offers blackpowder shooting workshops, storytelling, demonstrations, voyageur competition, and listening to folk and ethnic music. For the very experienced Buckskinner, there may be juried events they can enter. Not just anyone can enter juried events, though. Sometimes it is by invitation only or may require going through an
application process complete with pictures. In this case, the recreated site would have to be
complete and in use months before the actual Rendezvous. It is this level of commitment to this
lifestyle that is required of the “hardcore” Buckskinner.

The White Oak Society

The White Oak Society attempts to bridge the gap between Buckskinner and Flatlander
by creating a learning center for the general public to engage in the Buckskinning lifestyle
without totally committing to it. Located near Dear River, Minnesota, it primarily focuses on the
history of the fur trade era around the Great Lakes. To this end, they have built a learning center
and the White Oak Fur Post, a working replica of the original fur post and all the outlying
buildings: the smokehouse, the first winter building, the blacksmith shop, canoe shed, company
store, bourgeois quarters, bake oven, garden, pillory, fur press, voyageur camp, and the Ojibwa
camp. It offers events for novices and experts throughout the year including a Rendezvous
around the first full weekend in August, the May History School Days Program, and in January
"The White Oak Sled Dog Classic.” In 2005, they celebrated the seventeenth year for the
Rendezvous.

The creation of the White Oak Society was the dream of Ray Nyberg and Chuck Ogee.
Ogee had been a blackpowder enthusiast long before the inception of the society. Nyberg had
heard about Ogee’s hobby and was intrigued. As they discussed the merits of blackpowder, the
idea of a center for other enthusiasts in the region began to grow. They decided to recreate the
fur trading post that had been near Deer River and a learning center with information about
blackpowder and Buckskinning.
At the White Oak Fur Post, a reconstruction of the original 1798 Northwest Company Fur Post which was located three miles from the current site, the society holds its yearly Rendezvous. The fur post is open throughout the year, as well as during the Rendezvous, staffed by interpreters called the Norwesters. The Rendezvous is open to the public the first full weekend in August and offers a variety of opportunities for all levels of interest including workshops, demonstrations, and vendors that can supply the needs of novice or expert.

For the Buckskinners, the society sets up non-public areas for their camps. For them, the Rendezvous usually begins the week before the public events and can linger for a while after. Only those participants willing to follow the strict participant rules are allowed in those areas. These rules are very similar to those of the Rocky Mountain Rendezvous and others. They are even allowed a variety of ways of arriving at the Rendezvous including canoeing up the Deer River to the site.

The White Oak Learning Centre offers education programs and information on the Buckskinning lifestyle housed in the Rick Balen Library. The White Oak Society also publishes a newsletter called the White Oak Journal. For those interested in what the White Oak Society has to offer but cannot make it to Minnesota, there is the White Oak Learning Online Centre that offers much the same information, without the costumed interpreters. Through the use of interpreters, the White Oak Society has created its own version of the Living History Museum at the fur post and learning center. The White Oak Society offers opportunities for anyone to experience the Buckskinning lifestyle from both the Living History Museum and experimental archeological perspectives.
Summary

Being a Buckskinner allows both amateurs and professionals to indulge in a form of experimental archeology where they are required to use only the technology of the time to survive. Like the students of the Pamunkey Project, they are attempting to recreate an historical lifestyle utilizing as authentic as possible clothing and artifacts used by the eighteenth and nineteenth century fur traders of the United States. Unlike the archeological students, Buckskinners choose this experimentation as an alternative lifestyle that they practice several times a year. They are constantly working on improving their skills and understanding of the life of an early American fur trapper. The internet has afforded them the opportunity to share their research with others in the modern world, while the Rendezvous allows them to come together in community the way fur trappers did in the early 1800s. Though many of the Rendezvous, and especially the White Oak Society, offers the means for the general public to participate, being a Buckskinner requires immersion into the time period and being willing to live it as accurately as possible.

This level of commitment is not for everyone, yet there is the desire by many to experience this kind of immersion on a smaller scale. Places like the Norlands-Washburn program gives people the opportunity to live in the style of the late nineteenth century during a three day program.
Washburn-Norlands Living History Center

The Washburn-Norlands farm in Maine offers experiences combining aspects of Pamunkey and Plimoth Plantation. While the participants at sites previously discussed were primarily students and professionals, Washburn-Norlands has been open to the public since 1973 to anyone who wishes to Alive® the past. As a public historical site, it is open throughout the year. Visitors have the option of touring the site and participating in any of the festivals offered throughout the year, or spending 24 - 48 hours immersed in 1870. Table 1 describes a typical three day immersion.

The nineteenth century estate includes the mansion, a farmer’s cottage, barn, library, and a one room schoolhouse all surrounded by 150 acres of farm and woodlands (Washburn). It also offer special holiday events such as “Christmas at Norlands” with daily activities including popcorn stringing, caroling, wreath making, Christmas stories and, of course, lots of food. In the summer, a Strawberry Festival is held filled with day long activities. The public attractions at Norlands are very much like those offered at most other historical sites intended to bring visitors to the site and enjoy a day in the past.

The three day immersion programs are separate from the touring programs and are open to anyone willing to empty chamber pots and kill chickens. Norlands only offers these immersion programs twice during the summer. Reservations are necessary. The site is closed to the public during these times. It is this aspect of the site that is relevant to this study. Though the immersion is not as long as the two week minimum Callahan recommends, it does offer visitors a taste of the past through hands-on experience. A major difference concerning those who
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY 1</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:30 pm</td>
<td>Arrive; assign names, study maps of area, walk to Pray site and cemetery; help with chores and supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:00 pm</td>
<td>Supper and dishes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Fun Time - music and games, light snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9:00 pm</td>
<td>Bedtime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAY 2</td>
<td>6:30 am</td>
<td>Wake up; chores and help with breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:00 am</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Divide into groups – one indoor/one outdoor - groups will switch later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Noon meal (nooning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:00 pm</td>
<td>Research</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:00 pm</td>
<td>Chores and help with supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:00 pm</td>
<td>Supper and clean-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm</td>
<td>Story Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9:00 pm</td>
<td>Bedtime</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAY 3</td>
<td>6:30 am</td>
<td>Wake up, chores and help with breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:00 am</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9:00 am</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:30 am</td>
<td>Tour of Mansion, Church and Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Noon meal and clean-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:30 pm</td>
<td>Depart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1
participate at Norlands is that the Aprofessional® sites offer extensive training in the subject matter. Those willing to take on the immersion challenge at Norlands need not have any prior knowledge or experience. This is an important distinction that will be essential in examining the development of *The Frontier House* and *Colonial House* experiments. Rich Barlow, writing for the *Boston Globe*, described his experience:

> Among the items on the to-do list is mastering the era’s haphazard technology. Writing lessons with ink-dipped quills is cool—the urge to write with flourishes is irresistible—but having to dip the pen every few words is a hassle. Back at the house where the group is staying, popping corn in wire mesh baskets on the wood-fired oven is only partially successful when the rear burner fails to generate sufficient heat. The bathrooms are outhouses, and at night, even those are off limits; Norlands provides chamber pots.

> The kerosene lamps illuminate well enough to find your way around a room, but don’t even think about reading before bed. Never fear: Aunt Mary® (like the schoolteacher, a Norlands staffer who role-plays a real-life 19th Century Mainer) whiles away the evening with parlor games. Make any reference to the 21st Century and, like any sound-minded citizen from the age of Ulysses S. Grant, she looks at you quizzically and suggests a stay at the sanitarium in Augusta.

> (Barlow 1)

Some of the chores included mucking out the stalls, milking cows, grinding cornmeal into grits, feeding the chickens and pigs, and chopping wood. Though this may sound intriguing, challenging or even romantic, the experience tends to be a culture shock to those who thought they knew what they were getting into but in reality had no idea. Part of the learning experience
at the Washburn-Norlands house is a new appreciation for modern living. That appreciation may be the greatest learning experience.

Conclusion

Mathieu emphasizes that experimental archaeology is not intended to provide answers. Researchers or participants gain an understanding of possibilities and probabilities, but never truly prove anything beyond a doubt (8). Through the advent of experimental archaeology, amateurs and professionals interested in finding ways to understand the past on a personal level have been afforded the opportunity to “live” the history. Peter Reynolds describes his work as “not a museum nor is it a school. Rather it is a resource where hypotheses can be explored and where a negative answer is viewed as just as valuable as a positive answer” (Christine Shaw).

At Washburn-Norlands, experiencing historical living conditions has developed from a means of research to another option for members of the general public to “experience” history. If that does not sate their curiosity, groups like the Buckskinner afford a means to greater immersion and understanding. Though the experience can affect the individual in ways that he or she may not have ever expected, it still remains solely a personal enlightenment. The only way that non-participants, whether researchers or merely interested parties, could share in the experience would be through discussion with, or reading the writings of, those participants. The other option would be that they themselves have the experience.

The desire to have others share in the experience of living in the past without necessarily having to directly experience it is one impetus behind the creation of the PBS productions. Through these productions, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the audience can participate
vicariously in living history, not as a staged re-enactment or computer generated graphics but by watching other people, much like themselves, live in a simulation of a different time period. For all practical purposes, these productions are combinations of experimental archaeological and Williamsburg or Plimoth Plantation within reality TV constructs. Yet, these productions like the living history sites also seek to divorce themselves from being relegated to a theatrical performance. Kirby’s continuum will again be utilized to readily position these performances in the realm of acting.
CHAPTER 5
LIVING HISTORY AND TELEVISION

Introduction

The PBS and BBC productions of *The Frontier House* (premiered on April 29, 2001), and *Colonial House*, (premiered May 17, 2004) represent an amalgam of the living history museums and the experimental archaeological sites. Each production aired for six episodes. Yet for these two performances to occur, a catalyst was necessary in the form of reality TV. In this chapter I will examine *The Frontier House* and *Colonial House* both as forms of reality TV and also as a further manifestation of engaging history through performance. To this end, the influence of the previously discussed forms will be made readily apparent.

The advent of film continued the age-old practice of using historical events as the basis for dramatic presentations. Like pageants and plays, film also sought to bring some interpretation of history alive before an audience. Early examples would be films like D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). Film, though, also allowed for a new means through which audiences would be able to watch an actual event captured at the moment through actualities, newsreels, and sound recordings. Such events as the first flight by the Wright Brothers or the burning of the dirigible Hindenburg could be seen for generations to come. With the advent of television in 1949, the newsreel and so called documentaries were brought into the home along with a variety of other entertainments that could be watched from the comfort of the living room.
Documentary films and newsreels are two ways that film attempts to capture the “real.”

The documentary began as an attempt to capture real life on film, to document an event. In many cases this winds up being the dramatization of reality (Rosin 76). Though there is an assumed sense of reality associated with the documentary, many of the elements of fictive works also are utilized in its creation as Michael Renov in his studies of documentaries has described:

Among these fictive ingredients we may include the construction of character . . . emerging through recourse to ideal and imagined categories of hero or genius, the use of poetic language, narration, or musical accompaniment to heighten emotional impact or the creation of suspense via the agency of embedded narratives . . . or various dramatic arcs . . . In every case, elements of style, structure, and expository strategy draw upon preexistent constructs, or schemas, to establish meanings and effects for audiences. (Toward 3)

These elements help making watching reality more interesting because when it comes down to it no matter how real the film may be, people may still turn away if it is not entertaining as well.

Newsreels were like mini documentaries that recorded a current event. The audience was able to see the event as it had unfolded which gave the event a greater sense of reality than just reading about it. Both of these types of film use images from the past, yet they are still constructed realities, a performance based in actuality, a created narrative. The camera dictates how the world will be perceived by the audience, and the editor determines which slice of life will or will not be left on the cutting room floor.
In the 1920s and 1930s, Radio had more of a sense of immediacy since it was able to bring the news live into the home. Listening to a narrator describing an event and hearing the noises of that event in the background gave the listener the feeling that he or she was there. The audience trusted that what they were listening to was real. This trust was belied in 1938 with Orson Welles’ production of *War of the Worlds*. It seemed so real to many in the audience that they believed that the United States was being attacked by Martians. It caused some listeners to panic who had not heard the disclaimer at the beginning.

Television would bring the best and worst of both worlds together; the newsreel could be watched from the comfort of the living room. All television through the early 1950s and much of it for several years afterwards was live, reinforcing the sense of immediacy of what was watched and therefore affirming its reality. Yet film footage included in news broadcasts still contained edited images. Television has another constraint that is not as limiting for film, time. Predetermined time slots limit the amount of time that can be spent on any given story. Martin Esslin, primarily known for his contribution to theatrical criticism, has some interesting insights into the constructs of television programming. In his book *The Age of TV*, he describes problems associated with these highly edited productions and the extent to which the events are portrayed.

Television concentrates and intensifies its action by highlighting scenes with the greatest visual and emotional impact including scenes of violence while neglecting material that develops slowly or lacks visual drama. In a political demonstration that might have lasted several hours, for example, the thirty seconds during which the policeman’s batons were raining down on a group of protesters might be the only episode televised of the entire incident. What is
more, that brief segment will be edited in a manner that will give the episode a structure of maintaining tension to make it even more dramatic. (58)

Though the moments seen are “real,” such presentations often are accused of trivializing, sensationalizing, or misrepresenting the event. Ultimately, a newscast, a documentary, or a political debate, will be judged based on its entertainment value. Television is an entertainment medium. Esslin believes that there are three key elements to a successful television program: excitement, high emotion, and amusement. This echoes the sentiments of the Roman philosopher Horace when he stated that the purpose of theatre, or in this case television, is to educate and entertain. This consideration is important even when attempting to present reality.

*Reality TV*

Defining reality TV is difficult since there is very little that is “real” involved. The BBC has divided reality TV, also referred to as factual television, into six categories: documentaries and contemporary factual; specialist factual; current affairs and investigations, arts and culture; lifeskills; and new media (Annette Hill 42). Yet there are programs that fall between these categories, for example, *The Frontier House*, which combines elements from documentaries, investigations, and lifeskills. The other channels each have their own way of categorizing reality TV. Britain’s Channel 4 uses labels like Entertainment, Life, and History. The extreme diversity of programs that fall under the heading of reality TV, such as *Cops, Survivor, Changing Spaces*, and *Frontier House*, makes defining it very difficult. In lieu of a definition, Annette Hill, in her book *Reality TV* discusses the elements common in this broad genre, such as “non-
professional actors, unscripted dialogue, surveillance footage, hand-held cameras, seeing events unfold as they are happening in front of the camera” (41).

Though the term reality TV first appeared in general usage in the 1980s to describe shows that had a new “rawness” to them, James Roman, in his book *From Daytime to Primetime*, argues that there has always been reality television in some form or other.

Over the years it has come to television viewers in many guises and formats: sometimes as entertainment, when Steve Allen originated the man-on-the-street interview; as news documentary, under the watchful eye of Edward R. Murrow; or as a carnie side-show, with teary-eyed contestants telling the audience about their terrible troubles. (172)

One of the earliest of the reality programs was *Candid Camera* in 1949. It actually had begun a year earlier on radio as *Candid Microphone*. Television would continue to experiment with ways of bringing moments of the real world into the home.

The CBS program *See It Now*, hosted by Edward R. Murrow, was a combination of documentary and newsmagazine, broadcasting from 1951 to 1958. It was one of the first news programs to utilize simulcast technology which allowed Murrow to discuss unfolding events from both coasts at the same time. As the title of the program suggests, there was a sense of immediacy about what the viewing audience was seeing, creating trust in the authenticity of the information they were hearing. Walter Cronkite, another icon of TV news broadcasting, had his own reality based television show at the same time Morrow’s show was airing. As Murrow was focusing on current events, Cronkite was bringing the past alive hosting the production *You are There*, airing from 1953 to 1957. Viewers saw performances of past events presented like the evening news with reenactments posing as live footage. On-the-spot reporters commented on the
event as it was unfolding and conducted interviews with the famous people involved. The viewers knew that what they were seeing was not real, but the level of authenticity attempted in achieving a real representation of the past allowed the audience to “get lost in the moment” and feel as if “you are there.” Though on the surface this show appeared to be an enjoyable way of learning about history, it had a secret agenda. Most of the writers were part of Senator Joseph McCarthy’s Hollywood blacklist and had to use pseudonyms. They utilized the history of victims of society as a means of commenting on the modern day witch hunts of McCarthyism. Most viewers probably never made the McCarthy connection but anything more overt could have had serious repercussions for the network and those involved with the production.

“Real” People

Roman positions the show *An American Family*, premiering in 1973 on PBS, as the model for what would be labeled in the 1980s as reality TV. He relates its methodology to the cinema verité of the 1960s due to its use of unscripted action and portable technology (173). The twelve hour series was edited from several months of film that documented the daily lives of the Loud family in Santa Barbara, California. The viewers watched as the day-to-day trials and tribulations of this family unfolded before them. Many viewers who today have been enthralled with an inside look into the lives of Ozzy Osborn and his family consider his program to be a breakthrough production of the reality TV genre. In fact it is merely a descendent of a decades old program.

What is appealing about most of the reality TV programs is the use of ordinary people that the audience not only can relate to but could readily imagine “that could be me.” These
people were very much like us, not celebrities or professionals. The use of the guy-off-the-street was not a new concept with *An American Family*. *Candid Camera* captured the unscripted, unrehearsed reactions of unsuspecting citizens going about their daily lives as they faced some contrived situations. Games shows gave everyone the opportunity to have fifteen minutes of fame as they vied for prizes. *An American Family* allowed audiences to indulge in permissible voyeurism. Being able to watch on television the Loud family interact was not very far removed from sitting outside their window and peering in. These shows also offered a validation of our own lives. As the Loud’s family life disintegrated into chaos and bickering, the viewer at home could count his or her blessings feeling “there but for the grace of God, go I.”

New ways to incorporate ordinary people into primetime programming became the focus of producers throughout the 1980s, 1990s and into the twenty-first century. Various formulae have been attempted to maintain “freshness” in the genre. *An American Family* used a basic family unit, mom, dad, and five children, set in the safe environment of their own home. MTV’s *Real World*, premiering in 1992, went in a different direction with their version of reality TV. As the official site states:

>This is the true story of seven strangers, picked to live in a house and have their lives taped, and find out what happens when people stop being polite and start getting REAL. The Real World! . . . In 1992, The Real World spawned a new genre of television with its fresh documentary/soap opera formula. Seven diverse young people from all over the country moved into a New York apartment in the SoHo neighborhood of Manhattan. All seven pursued their own dreams in the big city—a model, a dancer, a writer, a rapper, a rock singer, an artist, and a singer—we witnessed their triumphs and failures. A possible romance developed between
two of the roommate Eric and Julie, the lone gay castmember, Norman embarks on a serious relationship, and racial tensions heat up between Kevin and the roomies. (MTV)

In this program strangers in an unfamiliar setting were asked to cope with each other’s idiosyncrasies. The descriptor “soap opera formula” was not a postproduction criticism of the show but a deliberate approach to its construction. One of the producers, Mary-Ellis Bunim, was formerly an executive producer of Search for Tomorrow, As the World Turns, and other soap opera favorites (Roman 174). The selection of the seven young adults was based on character types that the producers hoped would result in dramatic situations similar to those found on the average soap opera. For all its presumption about realness it was as constructed as any performance into a three act drama comprised of 24-26 half hour episodes along themes followed by the volunteers and staged by the producers (174). Thousands of hours of video are edited into 12 hours of television programming. This situation begs the question: how real could any of us be knowing that cameras are taping our every move every day, all day? Whether the audience members buy into this program as “real” or just see it as another entertaining half hour of television, it is classified as reality TV and has been popular for over a decade.

As Real World combines elements of a seeming documentary and soap opera, other manifestations of reality TV have their own complicated combination of elements. The Amazing Race: Family Edition (2005) combines elements of game shows, family and stranger interpersonal dynamics, and coping with unfamiliar settings.

The Amazing Race returns with The Amazing Race: Family Edition featuring 10 teams, each comprised of four family members on a trek around the world for approximately 30 days. At every destination, each team will have to compete in a
series of challenges -- some mental and some physical -- and only when the tasks have been completed will they learn their next destination. Teams who are farthest behind will gradually be eliminated as the contest progresses, with the first team to arrive at the final destination winning $1 million. (*Amazing*)

Every fall, a plethora of new reality TV shows hits the airwaves to try to capture their share of the viewing audience. Each has attempted to find an unique way of putting ordinary people into entertaining situations. One method of creating something new and appealing was to give them a voice to express themselves and comment on what was happening. This aspect of reality TV is referred to as the video diary or personalized documentary.

*Video Diaries*

Modern technology has enabled television producers to experiment with a variety of ways of presenting reality. Participants in many reality programs have been given the opportunity to take control of part of the production as they take control of the camera. The goal is to allow them to add their own commentary: how they are feeling, their opinions, or just a place to vent their frustrations. Some researchers have claimed that new technologies such as the camcorder have “introduced a democratizing impulse into TV’s factual discourse (in a sense that it has opened up possibilities for voices to be heard or images circulated that are not totally subject to the supervisory control of the broadcaster)” (Kilborn 21). Though this may be true, Kilborn points out that examples of this democratizing are rare and that “the new technologies have been exploited to strengthen the existing power base of established broadcasters” (21). The participant can control when and what they say to the camera turning it on at their leisure, but the
producer and editor have the final say on what is included in the final cut. These video diaries give the impression that the participant is talking directly to the viewer, creating a sense of intimacy heightening the realness of the program.

Jon Dovey in his article “Camcorder Cults” describes three ways that this new technology has affected modes of address:

First of all, the low grade video image has become the privileged form of TV ‘truth telling’, signifying authenticity and an indexical reproduction of the real world; indexical in the sense of presuming a direct and transparent correspondence between what is in front of the camera lens and its taped representation. Secondly, the camcorder text has become the form that most relentlessly insists upon a localized, subjective and embodied account of experience. Finally, the video text has become the form that represents better than any other the shifting perimeters of the public and the private. Video texts shot on lightweight camcorders uniquely patrol, reproduce and penetrate the boundaries between the individual subject and the public, material world. (557)

These shifting perimeters have blurred the previously accepted boundaries between the real world and the world constructed by television. Though camcorders have been used in various ways to give a sense of the “real” through what is perceived as amateurish technology, they have been used to great success as means of creating video diaries or personalized documentaries. This amateur status of video diaries can further authenticate reality:

When we see the ‘amateur video’ caption on broadcast news we are meant to understand amateurishness as guarantor of truth, in the sense of being ‘unmediated’ raw data, ‘captured’ outside of the usual institutional procedures of
news production. In this usage ‘amateur’ comes to mean somehow more truthful than the unlabelled ‘professional’. (Dovey 563)

The term amateur further implies that there is no manipulation of the message, that it is a pure record of an event, since the ‘amateur’ supposedly does not have the sophistication, wherewithal, or inclination to do so. This attitude is one of the ways that has affected the relationship the viewer has with what he or she is watching on TV. The narrator seems to talk and look directly at the viewers. The viewers thereby take a more active role as they are drawn into the action. Sue Dinsmore in her article *Video Diaries* has observed a cyclic relationship between the public and private as programs are showing a private life to the public in the privacy of their living rooms (54).

The *Real World* was one of the first reality TV program to use video diaries as part of their program. A room in the house was set aside as a make-shift studio. If one of the housemates felt compelled to comment on their situation away from the others, he or she could go into this room, turn on the camera, and have their say. It added a new dimension to the program, a sense of a conspiracy or shared secret with the audience. Some scholars have commented on the self-psychoanalytical opportunity these videos offered, serving as confessional, apology, or a form of release. The cameras create an egocentric atmosphere that encourages the expression of sentiments that might not otherwise be expressed.

In 1991, the BBC premiered a new reality program called *Video Diaries*. It broke new ground in the world of reality TV as a “new format for confessional culture in which ordinary people produced subjective footage of their lives on cheap Hi-8 footage” (Biressi 74). People interesting in telling their story wrote to the BBC in the hopes of being selected to produce their own video diary. If selected, that person was given a camcorder, recorded about 150 hours of
material, then had it edited down to a fifty or ninety minute program. This format was different in many ways from what had become the standard fare of reality TV. First, the volunteer was totally in charge of the recording. He or she was writer, director, and camera operator. Second, the program allowed the diarist multiple readings of an event. After he or she had finished taping, he or she was given the opportunity to comment on their own diary after the fact as a voice-over narrator. Dinsmore refers to this as re-reading the diary.

As the ‘speaker-witness’ to images of themselves, re-viewing their filmed records, the video diarists’ comments heard in the voice-over sections of Video Diaries not only ‘compliment and authenticate’ the image on the screen; they also serve as a means to suture the present speaker to the image of themselves as they existed in the past time on the taped footage. (48)

And finally, the greatest deviation from all other reality TV programs, the diarist had control over how the final product was edited with the help of the BBC producers and editors. Many reality TV producers have utilized the video diary option as a means of allowing the participant to talk to the audience, but these producers carefully have maintained control over editing.

Summary

The rise of reality TV in the past two decades has changed the “great wasteland” into a voyeuristic paradise. The percentage of reality programs on primetime in 2003 was at thirteen percent, an increase of five percent over the previous year. It is estimated that, on average, twenty-five hours of primetime television is devoted to reality TV programs, and the numbers continue to climb (Roman 177).
Based on this analysis of the reality TV genre, it is clear to see that *The Frontier House* and *Colonial House* readily fall under this category. Many reviewers have referred to these shows as PBS’s version of reality TV for the intellectual set, though the producers of these shows would beg to differ. Channel 4, one of the producing networks of *The Frontier House* and *Colonial House*, labels them History. Yet they have all the elements of reality TV: non-professional actors, unscripted dialogue, surveillance footage, hand-held cameras, seeing events unfold as they are happening in front of the camera, and the use of video diaries (Annette Hill 41). I argue that these shows combine elements of reality TV with the various methodologies attempting to present living history thus far discussed in this study: the Living History Museums, and experimental archeology.

**Time Travelers on Television**

The recent productions by Channel 4 of its version of time travelers are not Britain’s first attempt. Jay Anderson discusses an earlier BBC production created in 1977 which was very much like its later counterparts. A twelve part series called *Living in the Past* documented a year in the life of an Iron Age village in England. This series was the creation of television producer and amateur archeologist John Percival. Unlike the later productions, these volunteers were asked to live at the site for a full year, beginning with the building of their large round house in March of 1977 and ending their experiment in February of 1978. The volunteers consisted of six couples and three children. During the winter of 1976-1977, they were trained in the skills necessary for their survival. The producers chose a private estate in Wiltshire that had
ample fields for tilling and woods for building and fires. The volunteers were cut off from the “real” world except for visits twice a week from the film crew (Anderson, *Time* 130).

Though there are similarities to Pamunkey Project, one essential difference existed. The participants in the Pamunkey Project were trained in archeology. All were Professor Callahan’s students utilizing the project as a means to put to the test theories developed from their own research. The only documentation was the notes and reports written by the participants. The BBC production used volunteers who had no professional training specific to the experiment. Like the later television shows, they were chosen from a pool of over a thousand would-be participants. The final group included several teachers, two students, a nurse, a hairdresser, a doctor, a social worker, a union official, a mathematician and a carpenter (Anderson, *Time* 130).

From the footage gathered during the crew’s twice a week visit to the site, twelve half hour shows were created documenting the experience. Extensive editing was involved to create this production. The series showed the group’s early training and then focused on the agricultural calendar as a means of tracing its activities from spring planting, through the summer, into fall harvest and its subsequent survival in what was one of Britain’s harshest winters.

John Percival, originator of “Iron Age Village” project, had been to Lejre where he visited the experimental archeological site of the Polder Project and talked to the volunteers. As an amateur archaeologist, Percival understood the significance of the Polder Project. As a television producer, he was familiar with the typical approach to productions about history and archaeology that showed *A*backsides of diggers and chattering archaeologists® (Anderson, *Time* 129). He conceived of the idea of documenting a constructed experience similar to the Polder Project. In the end *A*the BBC Iron Age settlement. . . . served primarily as an interpretive project
and can be seen as a "living history" museum that reached its audiences through film (Anderson, *Time* 131). In creating this program, Percival has approached presenting history and archeology through Esslin’s three elements: excitement, high emotion, and amusement. From his experience in television, he is aware that in order to educate the audience, the production must capture their attention and sustain their interest, and the best way to do that is through the weaving of Esslin’s three elements with the educational information.

Twenty three years later, Channel 4 attempted to document amateur time travelers in action with *The 1900 House*. This production focused on life at the end of the Victorian era in the suburbs of London. Everything from finding volunteers, to training, to creating an authentic environment for them to live in, to periodically filming their activities, and finally editing the footage into six one-hour shows, mirrors Percival’s earlier production. Yet, I have found no reference to Percival’s efforts by any one involved with *The 1900 House* and subsequent “living history” productions.

Simon Shaw, a former BBC producer and current Wall-to-Wall producer, and his team found a turn-of-the-century house build in this era that could be restored back to its original condition in 1900. The team decided to limit this production to documenting the experiences of one family living in the house for three months. The problem with this production in terms of time travel was that once the members of the family stepped out the front door, they were back in the twenty-first century. They were allowed to travel around London to locations that would have been options to a family in 1900 such as the park, a swimming pool, and the museum. All of this they had to do in their period clothes, but their primary mode of transportation was the underground, non-existent in 1900. The anachronistic aspects of the production were glaring.
The 1900 House was followed by The 1940s House, which recreated life on the home front in England during World War II. Both were produced in partnership with PBS, and Channel 4 and Wall-to-Wall Productions. The house remodeled to 1940 conditions was situated within a larger, modern community, and it was very easy to access the “real” world, as seen in footage filmed in the first 24 hours. The family had been given live rabbits as a food source, but they were uncomfortable with the idea of killing and eating them. So they took them back to the modern pet store down the road. This anachronistic consideration was addressed in subsequent programs as seen two years later with an American version this living history format, The Frontier House, produced by the same companies. At the time of this writing, three subsequent productions have aired: The Ship, The Manor House, and Colonial House, which due to its association with Plimoth Plantation will be discussed later in this chapter. The decision to create The Frontier House and Colonial House was based on feedback from the airing of 1900 House for similar shows that focused on American history.

In all of these productions the audience not only is privy to the daily routines and interactions of people living in historically recreated environments, but also to their thoughts and feelings through their video diaries. These diaries were recorded on remote cameras permanently stationed throughout the recreated settings. The volunteers were in charge of turning on and off the cameras, and could add to their diaries when ever they wished. This footage was edited into the final product along with the footage from the film crews. The use of the video diary was not part of the earlier Iron Age production. The diaries allowed for the voices of the volunteers to be heard, though in edited versions.
Some of the suggestions by fans after the success of the BBC productions, *The 1900 House* and *The 1940s House*, were for an American version focusing on American history. Like the previous two shows, this one would be co-produced by Simon Shaw and his team as Wall-to-Wall Productions. The major difference would lie in the attempt to totally isolate the volunteers from modern society by setting the homesteads in a remote area of Montana. The premise of the show was:

three family groups (brothers, sisters, cousins, and individuals were all welcome to apply) traveled back in time to the days of the Wild West, living as settlers did in on the frontier back in the 1880s. No one could pretend it was be easy, but their story gave us a vivid picture of how far we have come, maybe even a little of what we have lost along the way. (*The Frontier House*)

As simple and straightforward as this description seems, it inherently utilizes performative constructs like a synopsis to a play: the cast, the setting, and the storyline. Yet, if asked, those associated with the production would most likely deny any comparison of what they were doing as a “theatrical performance.”

Having found the suitable location, the next step was to find the three families. The producers approached the casting of the show in the same manner as previous reality TV programs like *Real World*. The search began on Tuesday November 21, 2000 as KPTS, a Kansas PBS affiliate, announced *It's time to make American history... Could you live as a pioneer out in the American West?... We are looking for volunteers* (Simon Shaw 2). Applications were to be submitted to an email address, frontier@pbs.org. By the end of that first
day thirty-eight applications had been received. By the end of the month, one hundred and fifty
applications were being received each day. In all, 5500 applications were received by people
willing to give up the twenty-first century temporarily and take up the life of a pioneer of the
nineteenth century. Over the next few months, through questionnaires, and phone and personal
interviews, this number was reduced to three lucky families: the Glens, the Clunes, and the
Brooks. The Brooks would afford the team with an added feature to the experience by allowing
Nate Brooks and his fiancée, Kristen McLeod, to marry, frontier style.

Each of the families had their reasons for wanting to be part of the project. As part of the
questionnaire they were asked: What image do you have of pioneer living? The Brooks stated:

Connecting with the natural cycles of life. Adventurous. Overcoming great
challenges. Long days of physical labor. Community support. Isolated, gritty,
and cold, faithful. (Simon Shaw 21)

The Clunes’ response was a bit more detailed. Their family group included their three children
and one of their nieces.

Hard work. Family survival through togetherness and teamwork. Preparation for
the bumps and blows that Mother Nature deals out. Preparation in growing,
harvesting, canning, pickling, and preserving food. Taking care of farm animals
necessary for our survival. Hauling water from a well to the house. Chopping
wood to heat the house. Supplementing our diet with game and fish. Home
schooling. (23)

The Glens also were bringing their two children and the family dog. They answered:

Hard hard work. Rough hands, granola smell (all right we stink!), never enough
time to get all the chores done, always something that needs fixing. . .basically
heaven on earth! No worry about how my hair looks, are my clothes on the fashion edge, is my makeup okay, does this make my butt look big! First couple of weeks sore, tired, disenchanted. Next couple of weeks starting to make sense, next couple of weeks getting the hang of it all, and the last couple dreading the return home. (26)

Historian Hayden White suggests that ‘if you are going to go to history, you should have a clear idea of which history and you had better have a pretty good notion as to whether it is hospitable to the values you carry into it’ (White 164). This last is what made some aspects of The Frontier House and Colonial House difficult for the families especially in terms of survival. Though their applications seem to reflect a realistic understanding of what they were embarking upon, their perceptions of the past still tended to be colored by nostalgic notions.

The participants in The Frontier House had two weeks to prepare for their adventure. They learned cooking methods from the late 1870s, hunting, chopping, animal husbandry, and general cleaning skills, all necessary to their survival. They were given clothes, tools, and provisions packed in covered wagons pulled by draft horses. They also had cows and dogs as they traveled to their new homesteads. Each family’s homestead reflected differing conditions that the original pioneers might have encountered. In terms of staging, the producers created three difference sets that called for each of the families to utilize their improvisational skills in a variety of ways. The sets are what place the performance of the families into Kirby’s continuum categorized as “received” acting due the implied representation within the given matrix. Their actions are based in ordinary behavior but their context is within a larger production.

The Glens’ homestead had a completed cabin ready for immediate habitation. The Clunes had a cabin that was only partially constructed and without a cook stove. The Brooks had
to make their cabin from scratch. This eventually would be the honeymoon cabin when Kristy joined Nate, and his father left the project. As part of the agreement, Kristy would be joining Nate later in the experiment when she and Nate would celebrate a frontier style wedding. So to be a part of the project, Nate=s father began the journey with this son, helped him to build the cabin, and then left the project after the wedding. The three homes were separated by several acres of land but still close enough for neighborly visits.

Since their wagons could only hold so much in terms of foodstuffs and personal items, the project needed a way for the families to replenish supplies when needed. As part of their homesteading, they were expected to till the land for crops for their families and their livestock. For other supplies, Hop Sing Yim’s general store several miles from the homesteads was created and stocked with period items that could be obtained by the families through buying or trading. Though the name is similar to the television character on Bonanza, the inspiration for the character came from references to an Asian store keeper named Hop Sing Yim in the town of Big Timber in diaries written by neighboring settlers. In the companion book to The Frontier House, the one time that a direct reference to a “performance” occurring is in connection to the role of Hop Sing Yim.

Running our store and playing the role of Hop Sing Yim was Montana resident Ying-Ming Lee. Watch his assured performance as our pioneer storekeeper and you’d have trouble acknowledging that in real life he is about as far removed from the role as he could possibly be. Lee is a rocket scientist. (130)

It is unclear why the producers chose to man the country store with a “real” character instead of a generic shopkeeper from the era since, for the purpose of the production; it makes no difference in terms of the overall performance. Yet, it is this aspect that is carried over and expanded upon
in the *Colonial House* by giving all the volunteers characters to assume. It is also the aspect that will prove most problematic with that production.

It did not take long for the realities of the situation to hit home with the families as they began the three day journey to their new homes. During their training period, at the end of the day, they still had access to modern amenities though they worked hard from sunup to sunset. As they began their life on the frontier, they would be working without the guarantee of three solid meals or soft beds at the end of the day. As Adrienne Clune stated after her first night on the journey:

> I was looking at the sunset last night and thinking *How more beautiful can you get?* Then I lay in the tent and it started to get colder and colder, and somewhere in the middle of the night I lay there thinking, *Why did I ever let Gordon talk me into this? Oh, God. Only five months to go.* (Simon Shaw 71)

All the families stayed committed to the project to the end even though each found their own survival mechanisms. One of the consolations was that each family could bring something from today with them to the past that would still fall within the historical parameters of the production. The Clunes’s choice was the most creative. Mr. Clune brought a modern still and brewed his own moonshine that he traded for supplies.

One of the more dramatic realizations that all the families experienced was the physical changes that occurred. For some, body fat was radically reduced to the point of emaciation as their systems adjusted to the hard work and change in diet. Their greatest difficulty was in coping with deprivation. The families obviously had no phones, television, or cars; yet it was the little things that truly made the difference: no toilet paper, no shampoo, not even a regular opportunity to bathe or clean their clothes. According to their film diaries, they came to
appreciate these amenities of the twenty-first century. The hardest aspect of living in 1883 was leaving 2001 behind. This is what makes stepping back in time impossible, one never can Aun-know about the future. Though the volunteers learned the skills of living in 1883, they know of better ways to do things or of possibilities that never were conceived of by the pioneers. It is hard not to think about that Jen Air stove when cooking on a wood burning stove where the only control of the temperature comes from the measuring of the heat with your hand.

Some of the participants, like those with The 1940s House, were unable to resist the temptation to “cheat.” Aine and Tracy Clune were caught using eyelash curlers they smuggled into the cabin. This probably was not as much a breach of protocol as was Mr. and Mrs. Clune using a box spring they found. When asked about this, they merely stated that they were taking advantage of an opportunity that anyone from that time would. They seemed to disregard the anachronistic implications of the situation or perhaps were unaware of the implications. Yet, many aspects of the 1880s were ignored by the production company, including the advancement of technology and the resources to these remote, late nineteenth–century communities offered by the railroad. The program in actuality took an extreme view of the era and, in some sense, a worst case scenario.

The participants also came away with a greater appreciation for the simpler things in life. As one of the children stated during an interview with Oprah Winfrey, aired April 25, 2002, AI never knew we could have fun games that would be fun out here, but back home, they=’d be the most boring thing you=’ve ever heard of. I=’ve discovered my imagination (Oprah 21). On reflection, Mark Glenn summed up the experience stating:

I believe the object of this project was to see how modern people could adapt themselves to an 1883 mentality. To have a glimpse of what it took to start a new
life. I think it was a noble objective, but I now think that the frontier was the last really noble time, the last time Americans were across the board genuine. After that we became slanted, tainted, a bit full of ourselves. This was an appropriate time to pick just to see the last glimpse of innocence before we started that machine rolling toward the great American dream. I think we are a nasty, jealous society. But every once in a while we get an opportunity to prove ourselves and the three families here got a chance to prove that we still have qualities where we can work hard when things are up against us. We can still accomplish things.

(Simon Shaw 223)

These sentiments were echoed by director Nicholas Brown: It’s not a program about 1883. It’s a program about modern people visiting 1883. It says as much about us as it does about people in history@ (The Frontier House). These observations are in par with Susan Bennett’s concept of nostalgia as desire to recreate not an historic past but “an imagined and imaginary past which is more and better than the present” (5). The realization that what they imagined has little or no relationship to their reality is expressed frequently on the video diaries.

Carol Van West, in her review of the “Frontier House” for The Journal of American History, describes the program an “historically focused version of the poplar Survivor television shows” (1127). Much of her critique is based in what she perceives to have been the unrealistic expectations of the producers by creating a mythic West that became a “production useful for studying cultural anthropology, perhaps, but not the history of the American West” (1128). The producers have attempted to capture a moment in time and place it in a vacuum. Their only nod to the increased urbanization of the region and spread of capitalism can be seen with the Hop
Sing Yim’s dry goods store, but in 1883 Hop Sing Yim’s store would not have been situated in the middle of nowhere but as part of some sort of a settlement.

Though scholars may argue about the authenticity of the show, the lessons learned by these families, and vicariously by the audience, exemplify the advantages to accessing an understanding of the past and the present through performance. It is not necessarily the “real” history that is being sought by the audience but how these modern families cope with the deprivation of modern conveniences, and are forced to survive under conditions similar to that of the late 1800s. What results is a sense of the past colliding with the present.

Colonial House

Colonial House premiered on May 17, 2004. It is the third installment of the “house” series produced by PBS through their studios at Thirteen/WNET New York, Channel 4, and Wall-to-Wall productions, though it is the forth “house” show to air on PBS. Set in 1628, Colonial House recreates an early New England Puritan settlement akin to Plimoth Plantation. Like the previous productions, it is a six part series focusing on a group of volunteers asked to live under conditions of a bygone time for six months. In this production, the producers have expanded their approach on three fronts: bringing into the creation of Colonial House experts from Plimoth Plantation, increasing the number of volunteers involved to twenty-six, and asking the volunteers to take on “roles.” In Colonial House, the volunteers no longer play themselves in a different time, as in the other shows, but are given specific roles to play indicative of members of seventeenth-century Puritan settlements: indentured servants, the governor, and families with children. It is this “role playing” that moves Colonial House further into the realm of
performance and categorization of acting as Kirby describes it, and closer to a fictive reconstruction of the past.

Family affiliation was the only element not deviating from reality. The family units were comprised of volunteers and their real family members. As Dennis Cass, in his web review of the production for msn.com, observed “each participant is expected to behave according to his or her station and the entire colony is expected to function as a 17th century minisociety” (Cass).

Each participant was given a brief description of his or her “character” much like the employees of Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation are given, and much like the “sub text” a professional actor might create for his part. This is the description Jonathan Allen was given for his character Jonathan:

Jonathan is of sturdy yeoman stock. He proved to be a good student in school, so his father stretched family resources to send him off to Oxford to study--the first member of his family to do so. Unfortunately, his father died during his first term at university, leaving his family in greatly reduced circumstances, so he was forced to leave. Not long after leaving university he nearly died from a serious illness. So in a brief span of time, Jonathan saw his prospects for a bright future rapidly diminish. Fortunately, he regained his health and shortly after learned that a parish minister and his wife, Don and Carolyn Heinz, were getting ready to depart for New England and were in need of a servant. Though at one time it might have been beneath him, he agreed to indenture himself for seven years to the Heinz, in return for their paying for his passage to New England and for the prospect of owning land at the end of his term of service. Seven years is a long
time, but Jonathon knows that he has few prospects for a prosperous life in England, and after his recent ordeals he wishes for a new beginning. (PBS)

To help with the acclimation into the seventeenth century, the volunteers went through an intensive two week training session and were given relevant books from the period to study. One book was a compilation of colonial laws put together by the producers and advisors to the show. Though the original colonists would have been acquainted with English laws and their obligations to the colonial community as colonists, the volunteers would not. This book further reinforced the expected behavior of the volunteers and what their punishments would have been during this time. Though punishments such as banishment into the wilderness or worse would not be meted out during the experiment, those violating the rules could theoretically be banned from the “colony,” in other words, kicked off the show. The governor received additional information about the laws with a copy of Michael Daltons’s *Countrey Justice* from 1619 just in case an incident arose not covered in the other law book (PBS).

Another book compiled for the participants was the *Prayer and Worship Book* utilized for all the church services and the portrayal of religious ideas. Sources for this book came from the Church of England’s *Book of Common Prayer*, William Ames *The Marrow of Theology* (1629), and Lewis Bayly’s *The Practice of Piety* (1632) (PBS). These books helped to define further the performances within the colony. The prayer book provided actual scripting for the Sunday services. Though the producers would have seen the prayer book as informational on seventeenth-century religious practices, it is still a script that would dictate the actions and dialogue of the volunteers within the smaller production of the church service. This dynamic further illustrates the performativity of this production in line with Kirby’s and Schechner’s definitions of performance and closer to a theatrical performance complicating the show with a
layering of a performance within a performance that is partially scripted. Many scholars have commented on the theatricality of church services due to the participant’s actions being established beforehand with what they will do, say, and in what order. Not only is the Colonial House service a performance within a performance, but the volunteers are performing a church service that previously had been performed almost three hundred years ago. The difference between the old and new services was the commitment behind the performances, or lack of it in the case of some of the volunteers. Is it any wonder that with this complex layering the volunteers would have difficulty rising to the challenges and expectations put before them by the producers?

Working with Plimoth Plantation afforded the producers many advantages in creating this third installment in the house series, a resource not available with the other shows. A training team for the volunteers was created with history professionals versed in early seventeenth-century living mostly provided by Plimoth Plantation’s research departments. This cooperation was advantageous to the production team in that many of the problems concerning cooking, growing crops, and the construction of the houses in a recreated environment already had been worked out through the experimental archaeology done by the researchers and interpreters at Plimoth.

The hope of both groups was that the collaboration of Plimoth Plantation and PBS would further the public’s understanding of this time period by watching the extended use and application of seventeenth-century lifestyle techniques by the volunteers. Plimoth Plantation’s research information allowed for more specificity about the time period the producers were trying to recreate and the particular group of people that the show hoped to mirror. What was being recreated with this show was much more highly defined than the earlier productions. The
show goes beyond mere “living” like pioneers in *The Frontier House*. The producers needed to recreate the society of the time creating a more defined historical context within which the volunteers improvised. In terms of the experiment, this also meant less room for error and less room for individual growth and exploration by the volunteers. Success truly was dependant on the ability of the volunteers to play their roles, in other words to give convincing performances as New England Puritans. Unfortunately, this may have been too high an expectation to place on them.

Plimoth Plantation also benefited from its association with the production. It has since added new exhibits and workshops reflecting the dynamics of the *Colonial House* experience. Workshops were created for visitors to enjoy hands-on activities such as participation in building their own colonial house by helping to attach clapboard, thatch the roof, and daub the walls. Other workshops include baking food in a seventeenth-century oven, learning to speak a period dialect, or riding in a shallop, a small local boat. There even are plans for visitors to be able to reserve an overnight stay in a period house.

Despite all this research and preparation, most of the criticism of the show focuses on the inability of the volunteers to live up the high expectations for the performances placed on them. Though they coped with the day-to-day living in their seventeenth-century environment, the volunteers were unable to leave their modern American sensibilities behind and immerse themselves in their roles. White’s warning about “having a pretty good notion as to whether it is hospitable to the values you carry into it” (White 164) rang loud and clear with this production. It should not be forgotten that these volunteers were playing roles with all the “acting” implications associated with the term and as defined by Kirby’s continuum. Yet this aspect of their performance was neglected in their training. The volunteers were given a clear idea of the
expectations of the project during the training sessions and through the written source material. They theoretically knew what they were getting into, especially concerning the religious and social frameworks which they were expected to recreate. If any volunteer believed this was going to be a problem, they had the option to leave the project.

After the first training session, however, Charles Hambrick-Sowe, the religious consultant for the program, had his doubts as to the ability of many of the volunteers to follow through stating “even during that morning session there were hints that the practice of religion could become one of the most challenging aspects of their experience” (PBS). Unfortunately, his premonition came true. Throughout the performances the “settlers” continually challenged the status quo that would have been prevalent during seventeenth century colonial America. To make matters worse in terms of achieving authenticity, the reactions to those who flouted the rules were based on modern sensibilities and not those of the seventeenth century.

This can be seen in the religious strife that did ensue. Historically, many of the early English settlers came to North America, especially to New England, to escape enforced conformity to the Anglican Church. Though not all the early colonies were sanctuaries for non-conformists, such as Georgia and Virginia, the premises of this production reflect the dynamics of Puritan Massachusetts, specifically of Plimoth Plantation. In the seventeenth century, these settlers were a tight-knit community holding the same religious beliefs, who insisted on their own form of religious conformity, including mandatory attendance at church services. The original settlers at Plimoth would not have even considered balking at this requirement, but would have seen such attendance as part of who they were, and reveled in the freedom to express their beliefs.
The *Colonial House* re-enactors did not embrace this attitude, and instead brought to the setting their own personal beliefs and biases that continually clashed with the historical realities of seventeenth-century Puritan society. In terms of performance, they did not immerse themselves in their roles or accept the implications associated with a true understanding of who their characters were. The *Colonial House* governor and council also did not enforce church attendance as they would have done in 1628. In 1628, divergent religions beliefs and practices would not have been given a public forum; the dissenters would have been considered heretics, and most likely banished from the community such as happened to Roger Williams who was banned from Salem, Massachusetts in 1635. Williams supported the separation of church and state, and the right of colonists to take land from the Indians. This upset the local magistrates whereby they banished him from the colony. He would subsequently found the colony of Rhode Island (Constitution Society). The historians involved with the *Colonial House* project would undoubtedly have known of this historical precedent. Yet, they turned a blind eye when the governor and council at their colony approached the problem from a democratic perspective. The council allowed those who objected to mandatory attendance to church, to air their views with the intention of reaching some kind of compromise instead of punishing them accordingly. Again, though the day-to-day routines and physical demands of the time were followed, the attitudes and soul of the situation were not taken to heart.

Another example of behavior and attitudes anachronistic with the time was with Jonathan Allen, portraying the indentured servant Jonathan. In one episode, Allen announced to the congregation at the Sunday morning service that he, Jonathan “playing” Jonathan was gay. This action by Allen destroyed the illusion of an authentic recreation of New England colonists. The twenty-first century Allen believed that it was necessary that he be honest with his fellow
twenty-first century volunteers. He even admits that by doing so, he was “dropping out of
character.”

When I came out that Sunday Morning, when I stood up and told everybody, it
was no longer a TV show, it was just me trying to reach out to the rest of the
colonists and hope they would accept me. . . . It was really tough to (attempt to
live in) an era which would not accept me, that did not condone that (behavior).
Because how far can you go? How faithful can I be to being an indentured
servant and being gay. (Weintraub)

The rest of the volunteer colonists did not play their parts, either. In the seventeenth
century, sodomy was not only a sin in the eyes of the church but by English law punishable by
execution. Obviously execution was not an option for of the experiment, but the participants, if
ture to their roles, should at least have banished Jonathan from the community, or in this case
kicked him out of the production. Instead they allowed him to stay and even applauded him for
his courage. Dennis Cass’ web review noted other violations such as “the saucy indentured
servant Paul Hunt keeps swearing up a storm; Mr. and Mrs. Voorhees ditched church to go
skinny dipping; while freeman Dominic Muir sneaks off to [a twentieth century] town for a beer
and plate of fries” (Cass). Again, the governor and the council assessed no penalties for these
infractions.

From a performance point of view the volunteers totally missed the point of the whole
project, which was to recreate a seventeenth-century New England Puritan colony, thinking and
acting as well as living as those early settlers would have. This means taking on roles and
“performing the other.” The idea of “performing the other” is especially exemplified in this
experiment since the volunteers were asked to play characters that were different, sometimes
drastically, from themselves. The key is that they were not to play themselves attempting to live with seventeenth-century conditions, but actually attempt to become specific seventeenth-century Puritans. It was not in their purview to question or ignore the values of the early settlers but to walk in their shoes and see the world from their eyes. Admittedly, though, some of the volunteers found ways they could relate, nostalgically, to the early settlers. Jeff Wyers, a devout Southern Baptist cast as the governor, admired the devotion of the Puritans and was enthusiastic to “walk that path, the path of the people who came to this country for freedom of religion” (Weintraub). This sentiment again reflects the unrealistic nostalgic perceptions of the times which Wyers would come to terms with as he took on the role of governor of the colony. He may have embraced the religious idealism of the colonists but was unwilling to follow through with the authoritative responsibility associated with his role as governor of the community in secular and religious terms.

The culpability of the situation does not lie with the volunteers entirely. The producers could have interceded during the experiment to clarify the goals and put the volunteers back on the track of accepting the task to recreate a colonial settlement. There was also no compulsion to include the anachronistic scenes in the final product. They had hundreds of hours of tape from which to create the six shows yet they chose to include those scenes that focused on the anachronistic moments. Though these scenes might make for better television in terms of entertainment, what they ultimately achieved was to emphasize the inability of the volunteers to follow through on the purpose of the project. Perhaps then, the goal of “entertainment” trumped the producer’s original desire for “authenticity.”

The change in approach from previous productions to the production of Colonial House further complicates the success of accessing the past through the re-creation of an historical
moment. First, the producers were attempting to reflect a “typical” New England style colony of 1628 when there is only one example upon which to base their reconstructions. To merely recreate Plimoth with volunteers attempting to portray actual historical characters like William Bradford or John Alden would have made it just another historical recreation similar to productions on the history channel that discuss an historical event using actors to re-enact certain scenes or even merely a televised version of Plimoth Plantation itself. The variables are further complicated in asking amateur volunteers to create fictional characters differing from their own personae. The producers stop just short of creating a dramatic series set in a fictional seventeenth-century colony akin to Plimoth Plantation. Ironically, the producers may have gone further to prove the inability of these shows to recreate a moment in history by their inappropriate use of the very performance elements they hoped could achieve this goal. This conundrum will be elaborated upon in the conclusion.

Conclusion

The creators of *The Frontier House* and *Colonial House* attempted to bring history alive through the experience of modern volunteers willing to give up the twenty-first century and live as the pioneers may have. Wittingly or not, they have combined methods from other forms of living history that have been utilized for the past hundred years. The theory behind these attempts is that we learn better by doing or observing than by just reading. The two main methodologies that have been brought together in *The Frontier House* and *Colonial House* emulate the efforts at sites like Plimoth Plantation and sites dedicated to experimental archaeology along with reality TV constructs. Similar to the Pamunkey experiment, the
productions called for volunteers (students) to learn more about another time and attempt to live under those conditions for an extended period of time. Similarities to the Pamunkey experiment are:

$ Volunteers to conduct the experiment.
$ A training period with experts
$ Period provisions including clothes, tools, animals, and some food.
$ A designated site away from modern distractions.
$ Documenting of the experience. (video diaries)

The similarities to Plimoth Plantation include:

$ Performers dressing and interacting in period style.
$ An audience to the experience.
$ A training period with experts.
$ A designated site away from modern distractions

Where Plimoth Plantation and Pamunkey differ, the PBS productions find common ground. Volunteers of the Pamunkey project were performing for themselves. The only audience that might be considered as such would be those reading the volunteers’ documentation. Though the families in *The Frontier House* and *Colonial House* were in a sense performing for themselves, they also were aware that much of their experience was being video taped to be edited for airing at a later date. They knew their video diaries would be incorporated into the final cut which did give them the opportunity to perform for the audience behind the camera. Thus the participants were in a sense like the interpreters at Plimoth Plantation.

Another aspect of the cross over was the combined use of volunteers and paid professionals. At Plimoth Plantation and Williamsburg, there are volunteers as well as paid staff.
Though the families were volunteers, a crew of professionals was involved with the project in creating the environment, training, and the final program to be shown to the public much like the professionals involved with the presentations at Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation.

There are fundamental aspects that have proven necessary for the success of all these projects. Everyone involved must have some training in the use of period items. Since we no longer cook on wrought iron stoves or over open pits on a regular basis, this skill must be learned. Also, the replication of period tools and household items is necessary. The performers or volunteers are expected to use the items in the same way as the original people did and to dress in the clothes of the time. Even the relationship with animals can mean the difference between success and failure. Modern volunteers or paid interpreters cannot be set into an historical period and expected to survive or educate without the understanding of those times.

Part of the popular success of the PBS productions lies in their ability to reach a larger audience than Plimoth Plantation possibly could. The productions potentially can be brought into every home that has a television. The challenge for the producers is to create a production that people would want to watch. This is where the utilization of the reality TV format comes into play. The producers could have set cameras in place and let them record the activities as they happened and then aired the footage. Yet, the novelty would wear off quickly leaving the audience bored and uninterested. The incorporation of the fictive ingredients that Michael Renov elaborated upon allows the producer to enhance the prospects of distributability with the idea that these elements will help to maintain the audience’s attention and interest throughout the program.

Within the definition of documentary and reality TV as discussed in the beginning of the chapter, television producers have taken footage from an actual event, sequenced it, created a
narrative to explicate it, added elements such as music and digital effects to enhance the theatricality, and presented it to an audience. The narrator in turn gives a secondary interpretation to the footage to maintain its contextuality.

Yet, the programs go beyond mere video tape of these families living in Montana as pioneers in the late nineteenth century or in a seventeenth-century village in Massachusetts. Members of the families were given the opportunity to give voice to their experience through the video diaries. The cabins and houses were rigged with video cameras to allow individual volunteers to record their comments *during the experiment*, giving the commentary a sense of immediacy, and in a sense pandering to anachronisms. These commentaries were outside the reality the participants were attempting to create through their performance and, for all practical purposes, addressing the audience directly.

By categorizing *The Frontier House* and *Colonial House* as reality TV, I have positioned their performances within a particular genre of television. Though the events in the PBS productions are in the past, there is a sense of talking directly to us, the future viewers, through the use of the video diaries. Through the diaries, the programs comment on themselves. The diaries are reflexive on the events for future consideration. It is not seeing itself in relation to other events but in terms of that moment in time. With this production, unlike the BBC *Video Diaries*, the volunteers had no say with the editing of their diaries. Therefore the reflectivity of the video diaries becomes less the voice of the participant and more a part of the construction of the show and any agenda the producers wish to meet.

The PBS productions have attempted to take the desire to understand the past through “living it” to another level, by incorporating documentary and television production techniques with archeological and museum approaches to historical data to create a new form of historical
narrative. The question still remains: does this new narrative bring us any closer to an authentic or at least fuller, view of understanding of the past? How does the use or misuse of performance affect this goal?
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

...But is it history?

This study has explored various case studies which seek to understand history through attempts to recreate, or perform the past. I have demonstrated that attempts to present “living history” have been a cumulative process culminating thus far in the creation of televised productions like *The Frontier House* and *Colonial House*. The common denominator throughout this development has been the quest for authenticity in the recreation of a moment in time. To achieve this, those in charge have turned increasingly toward the inclusion of performative techniques. At the same time, though, they have rejected the notion that these efforts be considered a form of “theatre.” There seems to be a love/hate relationship toward the use of performance techniques among those seeking to present “living history.” Yet, the question still remains: has “living history” brought us any closer to authentically recreating or understanding history? In some senses it has and yet, as seen with *Colonial House*, the lines between the past and present sometimes can be blurred. Though performance can enhance the recreation and understanding of the past, the misuse of performative techniques can undermine the authenticity of that recreation.

“We are not actors!”

Throughout the examination of these case studies, performance has had an increasingly larger role in their attempts to achieve authenticity and reach the general public. Many scholars have resisted the idea that interpretation is performance as defined in the beginning of this study. It may be that this very resistance is at the heart of the problems inherent in the presentations of
The Frontier House and Colonial House. It is necessary to understand the nature of this resistance by analyzing how these sites or productions position themselves in relation to theatre.

Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation exemplify those proponents of living history that attempt to distance themselves from being categorized as merely another theatrical event. To quote officials at Colonial Williamsburg in the Visitor’s Companion of the week of December 10, 1990: “Character interpreters are not actors; they have no script” (Handler, New History 75). Plimoth Plantation’s management refers to its interpreters as role-players. Much of the discourse seems to center around semantics.

Steven Snow tells of one of Plimoth Plantation’s first interpreters, Martin, who acknowledged an understanding of Stanislavski’s acting method, but insisted that his attempt to recreate a Pilgrim Father was not acting, even though in his article, “Plimoth Plantation Interpretation Defined,” Martin uses terms like role, character, and staging. Snow quotes Martin as saying: “our impostors do not act out or play their character roles, because if they do so, in our experience, the visitors, sensing the presence of the conventions of drama, would tend to settle back to observe the entertainment” (Snow, “Plimoth” 43). Even though the word impostor has a negative connotation, Martin preferred it over calling themselves actors.

Martin’s sentiment has been echoed by Kathleen Rawlins, another of the role-players, who was interviewed for an educational tape about Plimoth Plantation. She states:

In some ways you are an actor but you are an actor who has been put into an enormous set without a script. . . .But I think much more than an actor as an educator. (Plimoth Plantation)

The official guide to Plimoth Plantation recognizes the relationship to theatre stating “like a theatrical production, living history made one single comprehensive and cohesive exhibit out of the entire Village, supplanting the former individual exhibits and displays” (Baker 21). Yet, in the next breath the guide qualifies this comparison:

Unlike the theatre, though, there was no distance between the stage and the audience. Consequently everything had to stand up to close and continual
scrutiny. Every element of the exhibit – each house, tool, plant or animal – was intended to be an appropriate and accurate recreation of what was probably present at a specific time in the past. (22)

Both Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation have attempted to define the role of what each, respectively, calls an “interpreter,” or “role players,” as an “educator” to enhance the seriousness and respectability of what they are attempting to do. Both sites also seek to distance themselves from any negative connotations about being merely another theatrical event or historical theme park. Much of this attitude can be traced to the early writings about the training and use of interpreters as detailed in Tilden’s book, *Interpreting Our Heritage*. Additionally it can also be traced to an even older tradition steeped in antitheatrical sentiments.

Most discussions on interpretation focus on the relationship between the history inherent at the site and its interpretation, never mentioning the significance of the performative quality of the interpretation. Each site seems to have its own approach and standards of interpretation as well as varying methodologies toward understanding the history involved. Rarely does anyone delve into performance techniques except for the distinction between first and third person interpretation with the substitution of “I” for “they” when discussing events. The primary focus is still on the kind and extent of the information shared in terms of authenticity and accuracy. Though Tildon acknowledges that “interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural” (26), he clearly differentiates this activity from “drama” hoping that interpreters do not “become tragic or comic thespians, or anything as horribly out of place as these” (28).

Stacy Roth references this attitude in her book, *Past into Present: Effective Techniques for First-Person Historical Interpretation*. She devotes an entire chapter to the question “Is First-Person Interpretation Theatre?” Her conclusion is that interpretation is a different animal all together. Roth recognizes that there are theatrical attributes inherent in first- person interpretation but that is as far as it goes. As Roth states “Interpreters at one end of the spectrum
consider themselves strictly educators and/or historians, they blanch at any insinuation that they are acting” (51).

Roth continues her argument by discussing possible pitfalls of first person interpretation:

The more declamatory the interpreter, the greater the amount of monologue, the larger and more passive the audience, and the less the environment resembles a living setting, the more interpretation blends into theatre. (51)

Here she is differentiating the dynamics between first-person interpretation and theatre, and furthers this distinction by focusing on intent and execution.

An actor is understandably concerned about the quality and believability of his or her performance, but an interpreter, by definition has a primary responsibility to relay a message. (52)

This message is driven by the need to maintain historical authenticity whereby the “role-player is expected to keep within the limits of documented facts and plausible conjecture, avoiding ingenious or surprising improvisation for the sake of dramatic interest” (54). Roth also claims that there is an inherent difference in performance through the interactions between interpreter and the audience in that the “audience response and participation affect mood an energy in both, but first-person commonly adjusts content to visitor interests” (54). She then challenges her readers by posing the question “Can the same be said of theatre” (54). The answer to that is yes it can in the form of improvisational theatre. Finally she blames “theatricality” for bad interpretation stating that: “first-person excels at adding an emotional dimension to the presentation of history, but when emoting obliterates the message, it ceases its interpretive purpose” (55). What she describes as “theatricality,” would be considered “hamming” by theatre professional and essentially bad theatre. Her distinction does not entirely work. What her argument comes down to is that if the interpreters are too believable, they have failed as interpreters.

On the other side of the issue are those scholars who readily assume the performativity inherent in the sites without the need for explanation or justification. They include Barbara
Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Steven Snow, Richard Schechner, and Michael Kirby. In Performing the Pilgrims, Snow utilizes experimental performance models that include “avant-garde performance, postwar experimental theatre, and postmodern performance art . . . [and] Asian performance forms” (xi) as a means of positioning his discussion. This understanding of the dynamics present at Plimoth Plantation is further supported by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, professor at the Tisch School of Performance Studies at New York University. In her forward to Snow’s book she states:

Today’s Plymouth Plantation is both museum and theatre, literally. Plimoth Village, the historical museum has not displaced the exhibit gallery, where archeological actualities are labeled and displayed in vitrines. Rather “experience theatre” stands in a strategic relationship to the “theatre of objects. There is a drama in objects – in the processes by which they are made and used. (xii)

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett readily refers to the interpreters as actors without apology. Their performances are, in her analysis, a mix of actuality and virtuality. Though the performances are based on historical information, they are only a virtual representation of a moment in time.

Even the introduction to the guide book sold at the Plimoth Plantation gift shop “sets the stage” for the ensuing performance:

At Plimoth Plantation in 1997, traveling to another age has become as natural as traveling to another town. Once we stroll by a sign marking the line between the 20th and 17th centuries, the past comes alive with a vibrant clarity. (Baker 5)

The objects are more than just props that enhance the historical authenticity of the site. They deepen the theatrical experience by drawing the visitor into the performance through all his/her senses.

Richard Schechner’s landmark work in performance studies, Beyond Theatre and Anthropology, helped to redefine the scope of artistic endeavors to be legitimately included in the theoretical constructs of what constitutes theater. He refers to Plimoth as a form of restored behavior and the site as environmental theatre, but theatre nonetheless. Schechner states that:
In ordinary theater the domain of the spectator, the house, is larger than the domain of the performer, the stage, and distinctly separate from theatre. In environmental theater there is a shift in that the spectator and performer often share the same space, sometimes they exchange spaces, and sometimes the domain of the performer is larger than that of the spectator, enclosing the spectator within the performance. This tendency is taken even further in restored villages and theme parks where the visitor enters an environment that swallows him. (96)

After defining the means by which the site should be included in the scope of theatrical activities, logically, those “performing” within the site should reasonably be considered actors though he acknowledges the lack of conventional expectations:

At Plimoth and elsewhere some of the conventions of orthodox American theater are dropped. The performers are not on a stage, not rewarded with applause, and they don’t strictly follow a word-by-word script called a drama. In some restored villages and theme parks, actors interact with spectators, making the visitor enter into the world of the village and thereby further blurring the boundary between the performance and its nonacting surround. The performers at Plimoth are acting, but they try to seem like they are not acting. (97)

More than anything else, it is Schechner’s broad definitions that enable the living history museums to fall under the scholarly purview of performance studies. This definition further enables the understanding of the interactive dynamics occurring through this burgeoning pedagogical approach to understanding history. Yet, many curators and interpreters believe that the inclusion or the acknowledgement of the existence of these dynamics within their sites may ultimately lessen the scholarly importance of the historical endeavors if not kept in check from becoming too “theatrical.”

The problem with the insistence that there is little relationship between interpreting and acting is that these critics are essentially splitting hairs. Using Kirby’s continuum of acting,
interpreters fall under the category of simple acting which he defines as “the performer does something to simulate, represent, impersonate and so forth” (6). Even if we buy into Roth’s definition that “an interpreter, by definition has a primary responsibility to relay a message” thereby using the argument that since there is no intent on the part of the interpreter to be acting, the interpreter can still be considered acting as a form of “received acting.” The example of “received acting” that Kirby uses refers to seeing someone dressed as Santa Claus drinking coffee in a setting resembling his home at the North Pole (5). What the viewer sees is an actor attempting to be Santa Claus. If the same person was seen at a Starbucks, the viewer might only perceive a man in a Santa Claus suit drinking coffee. The difference, though subtle, is significant due to the matrix involved. This example is analogous to a woman in an eighteenth-century costume working at a spinning wheel. She does not need to say anything nor have any intent or belief that she is acting. According the Kirby, intent is irrelevant. He states that “when the matrices are strong, persistent and reinforce each other, we see an actor, no matter how ordinary the behavior” (5).

Beyond intent, Roth has delineated her five characteristics of interpretation as a means of differentiating interpretation from theatre. These same characteristics can be used just as effectively to support the similarities with “legitimate” theatre. This is especially seen when considering the idea of the passive or active role the audience plays. This dynamic has been extensively explored by South American dramatist Augusto Boal with his “spect-actor” theories, by Richard Schechner and the Performance Group, and by Jerzy Grotowski and the Polish Theatre Laboratory. Boal’s audiences are encouraged to join in the action and to even explore the possible ways to address the issues being focused on through the performance. There is no script, just a scenario loosely created to consider an issue. The participants from the audience come up onto the stage and are asked to act out how they would resolve the issue through improvisation. Each of these theatre groups has encouraged their audiences to take an active role during the performance. These dynamics are reflected in living history performances as the
visitor is drawn into a discussion with an interpreter or a volunteer trains for living in the wilds of nineteenth-century Montana.

In the same way, visitors to sites like Williamsburg and Plimoth are encouraged to interact with the interpreters by asking questions and touching the objects. The theatricality of this environment tends to enhance, not diminish the messages which usually are focused on a social or historical issue.

Roth has posed an almost impossible situation within which interpreters must work. They must create a character through which they speak in the first person, but they must not be too real or they risk the audience not listening and being merely entertained by the performance. Yet, in all the advertising of these sites the visitor is invited to take a trip back in time. Old Sturbridge Village, another recreated historical site not too far from Plimoth, states the visitor will have fun in the past. The expectation is that the interpreters are supposed to be recreations of people out of the past, but how can they do this within the limitations Roth has set and still be “real”?

Other arguments against the categorization of theatre rely on the necessity of certain aspects of a theatrical performance to be used for theatre to occur. Colonial Williamsburg’s reliance on the lack of a script as a defining difference ignores the fact that a script does not define all theatre. The structure of Italian Commedia dell’Arte sounds suspiciously similar to the way Colonial Williamsburg presents itself. So, too, does the “interpretation” at Plimoth Plantation. Officially Plimoth Plantation stresses the educational aspects as the point of differentiation. The implication is that these two roles, actor and educator, are mutually exclusive.

This negation of the essential performative aspect of interpretation may in reality have nothing to do with what is interpretation and what is theatre. There is another issue that is based in antitheatrical sentiments that not only supports this distancing but affects hiring decisions. Since these sites are not categorizing what interpreters do as acting, then they believe that “actors” will not take what is asked of them seriously as a real job fitting their talents. At the
2003 American Society for Theatre Research in North Carolina, this issue was discussed among some scholars commenting that “actors” are unreliable as employees for interpreter positions. Though this would seem like an obvious outlet for their creative endeavors, the problem seems to be that “actors” are willing to quit with little notice to take advantage of a “real” theatre job. Again, this argument does not address the real issue at hand. Regardless if these sites hire actors or not, it does not change the fact that what interpreters are doing is acting.

History vs. Theatre?

Why do so many interpreters continue to insist that they are not mere actors? Why is this idea such a hotly debated issue? The underlying motivation for such sentiments may reflect the negative bias toward theatre that has existed for over a thousand years. By focusing on the interpersonal communications involved in interpreting knowledge and understanding, and avoiding performance considerations, curators are able to distance their work from being seen as mere dramatizations. Their fear is that theatricalization may threaten to diminish the legitimacy that they seek as custodians of heritage.

Many of these fears are based in long held antitheatrical stances. The irony of these interpreters performing as representations of Governor Bradford or John Alden, meant to help visitors understand the lives of the Pilgrims, was that these same Pilgrims abhorred the theatre. For them, actors were liars creating personae that were not their own. This falseness was seen as a sin in the eyes of God. The implication is clear. Actors are “fake,” they cannot be “real.” History is “real” and must be understood through serious educational methods. Therefore, actors cannot be historians or educators. Yet one of the greatest philosophers of the Roman world, Horace, believed that the goal of theatre was to entertain and educate. These same sentiments were supported by later theatre practitioners during the Renaissance such as Thomas Heywood and Ben Jonson.
Somewhere along the way we have lost Horace’s basic understanding and purpose of theatre. In doing so, I argue that this distancing ultimately weakens the attempts to present “real” history by not recognizing the advantages in seeking trained performers to better “tell the story.” The very language of “living history” brochures in describing good interpreting relies on descriptors that reflect the need for a high quality “performance” by the interpreters.

Snow asserts that these sites actually blur the genres, and history becomes performance. “History has been taken down from the museum wall, out of the glass exhibit and of the printed page, and become history performed” (Snow, “Plimoth” 35). This especially is true when considered in the light of the “ludic” nature of the site. Snow believes that the contradictions and sense of play that pervades the atmosphere at Plimoth emphasizes the fact that history is being performed by the creation of this “ludic” nature.

The illusion we create by means of a quasi-theatrical performance at Plimoth Plantation “mocks” the original culture of the Pilgrims. . . . when the visitors ask “may I take your picture?”, we often instantaneously respond “you can’t have that one; it’s filled with water!” These are quite literally “contradictions,” in different historical periods, words simply do not mean the same things and such differences are the source of a great deal of fun. (39)

Snow further supports his argument by agreeing with Schechner and Turner in terms of a liminal space having been a created.

The performance of impostorship that we give at Plimoth Plantation is both “play” in the theatrical sense of creating the scenic illusion of another time and place and “play” as an enjoyable interaction ritual in which the “actor/historians” engage the visitors. (40)

Whether the interpreters are willing to admit it or not, they are actor/historians or actor/educators due to this creation of a ludic atmosphere, a liminal space, and a scenic illusion. Scheechner believes that the continuing existence of these sites is dependent on their inherent theatricality stating: “these restored behaviors are very much like theatre in a theatre: the script is
fixed, the environment is known, the actors play set roles” (Schechner 94). In the larger scheme of things, it does not really matter if they call themselves actors or interpreters. What must be acknowledged is that without the performance aspects involved, whether considered in terms of “interpretation” or “theatre,” these living history sites would fall flat. The producers of the living history portrayed in The Frontier House and Colonial House might have avoided the glaring anachronisms present if they had given as much attention to the performance aspects as they did to the practical period training.

Role-playing for Television

The level of performance by volunteers involved with the television shows further complicates the issue of presenting living history. From a technical standpoint, as previously discussed, the very fact that they are television productions makes them a form of theatre. Are the volunteers in The Frontier House and Colonial House interpreters or actors? According to the definitions explored in this study, they may be both. Would the volunteers consider themselves actors or interpreters?

It is undeniable that these productions are inherently theatrical; yet their premise is based on “real” people having a “real” experience within the realm of a recreated past. There is a careful balance that the producer must maintain by not allowing the theatricality of the production to supersede this premise. In the case of The Frontier House, the volunteers are arguably “interpreters” or “actors” in the context of the production and the broad definition of the terms. They are playing themselves, though, dealing with an alien situation and expected to play by the rules imposed upon them by the given situation. On Kirby’s continuum, their actions
would be categorized as “received” acting. They can be as “real” or “natural” as they like but still be perceived as actors or not at the preference of the viewer. It does not change what they do or how they act. For example, the Glens, in the *The Frontier House*, were always the Glens. The rules were that they were to forget about the technology of the twentieth century and live day-to-day using the technology available to them in 1883. No other social conditions, expectations, or laws were imposed upon them. Yet because they dressed in nineteenth-century clothing and “lived” in a nineteenth-century setting, this created the matrix for the audience to perceive them as actors.

This balance was lost with the *Colonial House* when the volunteers were asked not only to cope with the conditions of a more primitive past but to assume the personae of specific seventeenth-century Puritans. At that point they were moved up the continuum to performing simple acting. They proved unequal to the tasks that level of theatricality imposed upon them for the experiment. *Colonial House* attempted to move beyond how modern families coped with the deprivation of modern conveniences and survived under conditions similar to that of the Montana in 1883 or New England in 1628. The audience was aware that the volunteers were not “professional” actors, but there was an expectation that the volunteers were meant to represent the spirit of the age through given characters. Instead, the volunteers began to adjust the values of the past to their modern values. What resulted was a sense of the present colliding with the past. Any attempt toward authenticity was not possible under those circumstances.

Part of the problem with *Colonial House* lied with the collaboration with Plimoth Plantation. On the surface, the inclusion of Plimoth Plantation experts seemed like a good idea. Yet, it may actually have over complicated the premise of the production. Plimoth Plantation is more than a group of archeologists researching and theorizing about how people lived in another
time. It has created its own version of the colony and staffed it with interpreters who replay the events of 1628 year after year. Regardless of how the interpreters perceive what they are doing, they understand the necessity of “staying in character” as they interact with the visitors. They would not conceive of discussing the difficulties of making a fire without matches since matches would not have been an option at either Williamsburg or Plimoth. I personally put this to the test when I visited Plimoth. I observed an interpreter entering a windowless building in the middle of the site through a back door with an empty water pitcher. When she emerged, her pitcher was filled with cold water as evidenced by the sweat on the outside of the pitcher. I followed her into another home and asked her where there was water. She paused for a moment and almost pointed to the windowless house, then caught herself and said that there was a cool stream nearby that supplied water to the community. I was the only person in the house and she could have just as easily confided in the makeshift greenroom in the center of the town but she stayed true to her character. What the PBS production really seems to have done was recreate another “Plimoth” in Maine, replaced the paid performers with volunteers, and taken away their greenroom and modern amenities (e.g. like going back to the twenty-first century each evening).

What the volunteers were not given was any performance training to be able to play their roles. Without this training the volunteers were unable to create the roles demanded by the PBS production. The more a performer understands the character he or she is portraying, and commits to that performance, a better understanding of the portrayed person and, in this case the time period, is achieved. That the performers disagree with the values and behaviors inherent in the character or period is irrelevant. It is the job of the performers to present the character and the history within its own terms and not their own.
The interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg or Plimoth Plantation would never declare their personal sexual preference in the middle of their work day, performance training or not. That information is completely irrelevant to the visitors and the task at hand. They would most likely be reprimanded if they did so for dropping out of character. This same expectation should have been part of Allen’s performance. As Dennis Cass in his web review of the Colonial House stated “you can take the man out of the 21st century but you can’t take the 21st century out of the man.” This is exactly what the PBS producers expected the volunteers to do. Cass further criticizes the program as a reality TV show gone bad.

Reality television once put strangers together so audiences could watch them sing or fall in love but now, several years into the genre, producers resort to elaborate, high-concept schemes to keep viewer attention. It’s no longer enough for participants to be themselves, they have to become someone else, whether a surgically altered beauty pageant contestant, a low-budget Bruce Willis or, on Colonial House, a lay preacher’s wife in early colonial Maine. (Cass)

He believes that the producers felt compelled to “up the ante” from the previous production of The Frontier House (Cass). Though the volunteers maintained their own names, they were not playing themselves. They were given the training necessary to cope with the technology of the seventeenth century but not the performance skills to assume a seventeenth-century identity. In a sense, the producers wanted them to act without being actors. It did not work. The volunteers allowed their twenty-first century sensibilities to override their commitment to the performance.

The producers changed the direction of the program in several ways as a means of upping the ante. First, the volunteers were to portray types of persons different from themselves such as indentured servants, obedient housewives, and for all of them, deeply devout Puritans. Second,
they were given a set of laws and regulations that they had to abide by, even if these laws clashed with their own value system. Unfortunately, some of the volunteers chose to ignore, or in some cases, simply reject these restrictions placed upon their performance. Third, they were given a scenario within which they needed to accomplish certain goals during the time frame of the experiment. These included acquiring a certain amount of goods such as furs to be shipped back to England to pay off their debt to the shipping company that had brought them to the New World. These are major differences from the dynamics of the previous House productions. The volunteers on *Colonial House* have been asked to role play, to pretend they are the early colonists. The only thing these “plays” are missing is a script telling them what to say, except in the case of the church services. As the infractions seem to indicate, the volunteers were unable to follow through on these expectations. Even the producers are forced to acknowledge the problems of the program. Producer Sallie Clement states:

> Not only does *Colonial House* capture the drama of everyday life in a small colony but it also shows how ordinary people cope – or in many cases don’t cope – when removed from all that is familiar and comforting to them in the modern world. . . . Our disparate group of colonists were catapulted into a life that demanded they set aside their many differences for the sake of survival. (PBS)

Her comments focus on the experience of the modern day time travelers and not the insight into the past that we are supposed to gain from the experience as the advertisements for the programs suggests. At the same time, she is not acknowledging the reasons behind why the volunteers were unable to cope which lies in the inability to meet the demands of the performance. In essence she is echoing the comments of Nicholas Brown, the director of *The Frontier House* about the message of the show “is not a program about [1628]. It’s a program about modern
people visiting [1628]. It says as much about us as it does about people in history” (*The Frontier House*). Yet, the producers probably thought that these changes were necessary. As Esslin pointed out, television is about entertainment and audiences are always seeking something new to titillate their interest. Therefore the producers, in the name of entertainment, “upped the ante” by giving the audience something new, unfortunately at the expense of their original goal of producing living history.

The anachronisms of the production lie in the misuse or neglect of performance techniques that have been successful at Williamsburg and Plimoth. The volunteers failed to submerge themselves into their role-playing. They could not – they did not know how because they lacked the basic performance techniques. This failure affects any sense of authenticity that the experiment could have achieved in understanding what it might have been like to live in a seventeenth-century, Puritan colonial village. In terms of the various manifestations of living history and symbiotic relationships between them that I have been discussing, the producers, in attempting to “up the ante,” have actually deviated further away from achieving any sense of authenticity. The show became an anthropological study, as Carol Van West said of the shortcomings of *The Frontier House*, as opposed to history. We watched as twenty-first century people learned that the bucolic image of the Pilgrims carving out a new life in the New World is a nostalgic narrative of a past that never was. Instead of coping with the ideologies of the times, many of the volunteers chose to create a past in their own image adjusting the rules to fit their modern beliefs and nostalgic sentiments. The anachronisms became so prevalent that the only resemblance to 1628 lied in the clothes and setting. In a sense we have come full circle to that of the earlier museums which were a collection of oddities without true historical context.
The fact that these are television shows complicates the ability to achieve the historical goals of the productions. It must not be forgotten that the producers are forced to maintain a balancing act between faithful re-enactments and the practical commercial aspects of any successful television show to sustain an audience. It could be argued that the anachronistic scenes were included in the final cut with the intent of tantalizing the audience because it would make for better television. These scenes add a sense of conflict taking the production beyond the ability of the volunteers to merely survive in these situations and into the realm of an historical *Survivor*. Some of the producers may have been secretly hoping for a crisis between the past and the present.

Do these performances help in understanding history?

Cary Carson, in his article “Living Museums of Everyman’s History” concerning Plimoth Plantation, problematizes the idea of history speaking for itself. He believes the problem with this approach is that the public is asked to “take us as you find us and make whatever sense of things that you can” (Carson 28). The average tourist on vacation, looking to have some fun and entertainment, usually cannot be bothered to consider the activities beyond their face value. Though the interpreters may create an environment conducive to further speculation on larger social dynamics, visitors rarely venture into those realms of speculation or discovery.

Are these realms of speculation necessary for historical meaning to be discerned? Many visitors find the experience more enriching and understandable than the conventional approaches to teaching history that they may have experienced. P. H. Stone and B. L. Molyneaux’s article with the National Parks Service posits four approaches to the understanding of the past:
academic or theoretical archaeology, indigenous views of the past, school history, and the past as presented to the general public in museums and “historic sites” (John Jameson 23).

As I have tried to argue in this study, we should add a fifth: the general public given the opportunity to live the past themselves. This approach to history is a modern manifestation of our continuing endeavor to understand how those that came before us lived and thought; creating the world in which we now live. It combines the idea of archaeology and living history sites. As Dahiya discovered, students responded more enthusiastically to the hands-on method of learning than to conventional methods of books and lecture. The Frontier House and Colonial House attempt to expand the hands-on approach by placing real people in a simulated past to be viewed by real people, through the constructs of reality TV with the hope that television and film may prove just as successful in engaging the past

Summary

Some of the criticism toward living history experiences comes from those who believe in the futility of accessing the past. In postmodern terms, there is no “truth” to be accessed in the first place. The past is a collage of many truths depending on points of view. Philosopher Frederick Jameson in his discussions on the constructs of post-modernism argues that the past being portrayed is “an idea of the past which exists entirely in the present” (317). The past represented today may become a different thing entirely in tomorrow’s view. Jameson goes on to state that “we are condemned to seek history by way of our own pop images and simulacra of the history which itself remains forever out of reach” (317). These theories are further explored by Umberto Eco in his essay “Travels in Hyperreality.” What is reality? Where does that which is real become more real than that which was real being recreated? Eco states:
To speak of things that one wants to connote as real, these things must seem real. The “completely real” becomes identified with the “completely fake.” Absolute unreality is offered as real presence. (7)

Since these historical recreations cannot be truly authentic, they try to be as seemingly real as possible. Thus, though the visitors know nothing presented is original, the realness of the place allows the visitor to indulge in the suspension of disbelief and buy into the reality of the experience.

The productions of The Frontier House and Colonial House exemplify this new manifestation of the blurring of realities as professed by scholars today as indicative of postmodernism. In his discussion of postmodernist culture, Steven Connor believes that:

Put simply, it may be said that ours is a culture that is so saturated with and fascinated by techniques of representation and reproduction, that it has become difficult for us to be sure where action ends and performance begins. (109)

In today’s society, one that is permeated with visual stimulation with television, movies, videos and electronic games, it is no wonder that we would seek a means to utilize our visual technology to gain a better understanding of the past. The methodologies behind reality TV have afforded a means for historians and producers to attempt just that. Yet the “real” remains elusive.

It is easy to categorize the interpreters at Plimoth Plantation and Colonial Williamsburg as the performers of history for a visiting audience. The participants at the archeological sites experience history but primarily for their own edification. Though these experiences may be documented, the lived experience is lost on the written page. With The Frontier House, Colonial House, and other such productions, the lived experience by “ordinary” people is, though in an edited form, shared by those observing from the comfort of their living rooms. The television audience is able vicariously to learn about the past as experienced by people that they can see as no different from themselves. It could just as easily be anyone watching who was living in a
cabin in Montana or a seventeenth-century house as those volunteers in the program. What is lost is the direct interaction as found in the living museum sites.

The point must not be lost that these sites and productions simulate the past and should not be confused with being representations of any authentic past. In the television productions, the volunteers are performing in a setting that is a simulation of what the actual setting may have been like. Visitors to Williamsburg and Plimoth are not, as the advertisements for Sauder Village states, “having fun in the past” but experiencing a simulation of the sights, sounds, and smells of what the original settlements may have had. Simulation has become so pervasive in our society that we take it for granted, especially as explored in realms of virtual reality. Even an airplane pilot can experience part of his training without stepping on board a real plane but through a machine that simulates flying. That which is simulated is in many cases readily accepted as a suitable substitute for the real thing. Connor observes that:

Ours is a world, it is commonly said, of widespread and pervasive simulation, in which the traditional means of separating off instances of performance from instances of the real seem to be compromised, if not wholly superseded. (109)

But is this necessarily a bad thing as Connor implies? If, as Jameson believes, the past itself remains forever out of reach, then what can we achieve in terms of understanding the events of the past? It seems the best we can do is to simulate the past based on evidence at hand. As Jameson would have put it, always historicize. Yet, these simulations can allow for an experiential insight into the lives that people from earlier time periods lived. We can gain a glimpse into their world as they may have seen it by using their tools and living in or at least visiting their homes.

The idea of simulation especially as pertains to imitation always has been an integral part of performance. Thus if these sites and productions are based in simulation then they cannot possibly hope to divorce themselves from the performative aspects that would be inherent in that simulation. This is what the producers of Colonial House seemed to have attempted to do, and which ultimately led to anachronisms of the production and lack of authenticity taking it away
from an historical experiment and becoming a sociological one instead. By ignoring the need for performance considerations in terms of character understanding and commitment, the producers set the show up to implode *vis a vis* the anachronistic elements that occurred.

As with any exploration, though, these shows are not the end but merely another manifestation in historians’ continued effort to engage the past and make it accessible to the general public.


Green, Timothy. “Modern Britons Try the Iron Age, Find They Like It.” *Smithsonian* 9.3 (June) 1978: 80-87.


Kirby, Michael. AReconstruction. @ *The Drama Review*. 28.3 Fall 1984: 2.


The sites listed in this appendix all have some form of interpretive program that attempts to recreate a local event in history or an historic period.

Included are the city and states where they are located and their opening dates to the public where available.

The majority of these sites come from the AFLHAM webpage which provides website links.
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<th>Name</th>
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<td>Agrirama</td>
<td>Tifton, Georgia</td>
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<td>Ardenwood Historic Farm</td>
<td>Freemont, California</td>
<td>1985</td>
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<tr>
<td>Astor House Museum</td>
<td>Golden, Colorado</td>
<td>1972</td>
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<td>Battlefield House Museum</td>
<td>Stoney Creek, Ontario</td>
<td>1899</td>
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<td>Battles Museums of Rural Life</td>
<td>Girard, Pennsylvania</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site</td>
<td>La Junta, Colorado</td>
<td>1976</td>
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<td>Billings Farm and Museum</td>
<td>Woodstock, Vermont</td>
<td>1983</td>
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<td>Buffalo Gap Historic Village</td>
<td>Buffalo Gap, Texas</td>
<td>1999</td>
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<td>Calico Ghost Town</td>
<td>Yermo, California</td>
<td>1966</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cape May Lighthouse and Physick Estate</td>
<td>Cape May, New Jersey</td>
<td>1970</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chester Eastman Homestead</td>
<td>North Chatham, New Hampshire</td>
<td>1966</td>
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<tr>
<td>Claude Moore Colonial Farm</td>
<td>McLean, Virginia</td>
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Clear Creek History Park
Golden Colorado
**Opening Date:** 1999

Colonial Williamsburg
Williamsburg, West Virginia
**Opening Date:** 1932

Conner Prairie
Fishers, Indiana
**Opening Date:**

Constitution Hall Village
Huntsville, Alabama
**Opening Date:**

Dakota City Heritage Village
Farmington, Missouri
**Opening Date:** 1994

Daniel Webster Living History Project
Franklin, New Hampshire
**Opening Date:** 1997

Delaware Agricultural Museum
Dover, Delaware
**Opening Date:** 1980

Door County Museum
Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin
**Opening Date:** 1997

Dudley Farm
Guilford, Connecticut
**Opening Date:** 1991

Dudley Farm
Gainesville, Florida
**Opening Date:** 1983

Eklutna Village Historical Park
Eagle River, Alaska
**Opening Date:** 1990

El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Monument
Los Angeles, California
**Opening Date:** 1989

El Rancho De Los Golondrinas
Santa Fe, New Mexico
**Opening Date:** 1972

Enfield Shaker Museum
Enfield, New Hampshire
**Opening Date:** 1986

Erie Canal Museum
Syracuse, New York
**Opening Date:** 1962

Farm America
Waseca, Minnesota
**Opening Date:** 1978

Farmers Museum
Cooperstown, New York
**Opening Date:** 1944

Fort King George
Darien, Georgia,
**Opening Date:** 1969
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<tr>
<th>Site Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Opening Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fort Nisqually</td>
<td>Tacoma, Washington</td>
<td>1934</td>
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<td>George Ranch Historical Park</td>
<td>Richmond, Texas</td>
<td>1987</td>
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<td>Fort Ticonderoga</td>
<td>Ticonderoga, New York</td>
<td>1909</td>
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<td>George Key Ranch Historical Park</td>
<td>Pacentia, California</td>
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<td>Fort William Henry</td>
<td>Lake George, New York</td>
<td>1954</td>
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<td>Graeme Park</td>
<td>Horsham, Pennsylvania</td>
<td>1958</td>
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<td>Freetown Village Living History Museum</td>
<td>Indianapolis, Indiana</td>
<td>1985</td>
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<td>Hagley Museum and Library</td>
<td>Wilmington, Delaware</td>
<td>1961</td>
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<td>Freewoods Farm</td>
<td>Columbia, South Carolina</td>
<td>1999</td>
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<td>Hale Farm &amp; Village</td>
<td>Bath, Ohio</td>
<td>1958</td>
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<td>Frontier Culture Museum</td>
<td>Staunton, West Virginia</td>
<td>1988</td>
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<td>Hancock Shaker Village</td>
<td>Pittsfield, Massachusetts</td>
<td>1961</td>
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<td>Frying Pan Park</td>
<td>Herndon, Virginia</td>
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<td>Hanford Mills Museum</td>
<td>East Meredith, New York</td>
<td>1967</td>
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<td>Garfield Farm</td>
<td>LaFox, Illinois</td>
<td>1977</td>
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<td>Harper's Ferry National Historic Park</td>
<td>Harper's Ferry, Virginia</td>
<td>1963</td>
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<td>Genesee Country Museum</td>
<td>Mumford, New York</td>
<td>1966</td>
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<td>Henry Ford Museum &amp; Greenfield Village</td>
<td>Dearborn, Michigan</td>
<td>1929</td>
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<td>Site Name</td>
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<td>Heritage New Hampshire</td>
<td>Glenn, New Hampshire</td>
<td>1976</td>
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<td>Hermann-Grima &amp; Gallier Historic Houses</td>
<td>New Orleans, Louisiana</td>
<td>1971</td>
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<td>Historic Arkansas Museum</td>
<td>Little Rock, Arkansas</td>
<td>1941</td>
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<td>Historic Bartram's Garden</td>
<td>Philadelphia, Pennsylvania</td>
<td>1891</td>
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<td>Historic Batsto Village</td>
<td>Harmonton, New Jersey</td>
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<td>Historic Cold Spring Village</td>
<td>Cape May, New Jersey</td>
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<td>Historic Collinsville</td>
<td>Southside, Tennessee</td>
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<td>Historic Deerfield</td>
<td>Deerfield Massachusetts</td>
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<td>Historic Elk Landing</td>
<td>Elktown, Maryland</td>
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<td>Historic Fallsington</td>
<td>Fallsington, Pennsylvania</td>
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<td>Historic Hudson Valley</td>
<td>Tarrytown, New York</td>
<td>1988</td>
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<td>Historic Latta Plantation</td>
<td>Huntersville, North Carolina</td>
<td>1975</td>
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<td>Historic New Harmony</td>
<td>New Harmony, Indiana</td>
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<td>Historic Richmond Town</td>
<td>Stanton Island, New York</td>
<td>1958</td>
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<td>Historic Saint Augustine Spanish Quarter</td>
<td>Saint Augustine, Florida</td>
<td>1969</td>
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<td>Historic Saint Mary's City</td>
<td>Saint Mary's City, Maryland</td>
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<td>Historical Sauder Village</td>
<td>Archibald, Ohio</td>
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<td>Howell Living History Farm</td>
<td>Titusville, New Jersey</td>
<td>1973</td>
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<td>Museum Name</td>
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<td>Opening Date</td>
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<td>Jamestown Settlement &amp; Yorktown Victory Center</td>
<td>Williamsburg, Virginia</td>
<td>1976</td>
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<td>Kline Creek Farm</td>
<td>Winfield, Illinois</td>
<td>1984</td>
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<td>La Purisima Mission State Historic Part</td>
<td>Lompoc, California</td>
<td>1941</td>
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<td>Landis Valley Museum</td>
<td>Lancaster, Pennsylvania</td>
<td>1925</td>
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<td>Liendo Plantation</td>
<td>Hempstead, Texas</td>
<td>1970</td>
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<td>Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site</td>
<td>Petersburg, Illinois</td>
<td>1933</td>
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<td>Living History Farms</td>
<td>Urbandale, Iowa</td>
<td>1970</td>
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<td>Living History Museum</td>
<td>Marlboro, Vermont</td>
<td>1995</td>
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<td>MacGregor Ranch</td>
<td>Estes Park, Colorado</td>
<td>1973</td>
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<td>Meadowcroft Museum of Rural Life</td>
<td>Avella, Pennsylvania</td>
<td>1969</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middleton Place</td>
<td>Charleston, North Carolina</td>
<td>1974</td>
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<td>Mission House Museum</td>
<td>Honolulu, Hawaii</td>
<td>1920</td>
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<td>Mission San Juan Capistrano</td>
<td>San Juan Capistrano, California</td>
<td>1910</td>
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<td>Missouri Town 1855</td>
<td>Lee's Summit, Missouri</td>
<td>1964</td>
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<td>Morningside Living History Farm</td>
<td>Gainesville, Florida</td>
<td>1969</td>
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<td>Museum at Prophetstown</td>
<td>Battle Ground, Indiana</td>
<td>2000</td>
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<td>Museum of Appalachia</td>
<td>Norris, Tennessee</td>
<td>1967</td>
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<td>Museum Village</td>
<td>Monroe, New York</td>
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Mystic Seaport and Maritime Museum
Mystic, Connecticut
**Opening Date:** 1929

Naper Settlement
Naperville, Illinois
**Opening Date:** 1969

National Ranching Heritage Center
Lubbock, Texas
**Opening Date:** 1976

Native Village of Alaskaland
Fairbanks, Alaska
**Opening Date:**

Newbold White House
Hertford, North Carolina
**Opening Date:** 1981

Oconaluftee Indian Village
Cherokee, North Carolina
**Opening Date:** 1952

Ohio Village
Columbus, Ohio
**Opening Date:**

Old Barracks Museum
Trenton, New Jersey
**Opening Date:** 1902

Old Bethpage Village Restoration
Old Bethpage, New York
**Opening Date:** 1963

Old City Cemetery
Lynchburg, Virginia
**Opening Date:** 1986

Old City Park
Dallas, Texas
**Opening Date:** 1966

Old Cowtown Museum
Wichita, Kansas
**Opening Date:** 2000

Old Salem
Winston-Salem, North Carolina
**Opening Date:** 1950

Old Sturbridge Village
Sturbridge, Massachusetts
**Opening Date:** 1946

Old West Living History Foundation
Petaluma, California
**Opening Date:** 1995

Old World Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin
**Opening Date:** 1976

Ozaukee County Pioneer Village
Cedarburg, Wisconsin
**Opening Date:**

Pamplin Historical Park
Petersburg, Virginia
**Opening Date:** 1999
Peinhardt Living History Farm
Cullman, Alabama
**Opening Date:**1992

Pella Historical Village
Pella, Iowa
**Opening Date:**1966

Pioneer Arizona
Phoenix, Arizona
**Opening Date:**1969

Pioneer Farm
Austin, Texas
**Opening Date:**1953

Pioneer Farm Museum and Ohop Indian Village
Eatonville, Washington
**Opening Date:**1975

Pioneer Village and Idaho Historical Museum
Boise, Idaho
**Opening Date:**1972

Plimoth Plantation
Plymouth, Massachusetts
**Opening Date:**1947

Pomeroy Living History Program
Yacolt, Washington
**Opening Date:**1988

Port Columbus Civil War Naval Center
Columbus, Georgia
**Opening Date:**2001

Quiet Valley Living Historical Farm
Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania
**Opening Date:**1963

Remick Country Doctor Museum & Farm
Tamworth, New Hampshire
**Opening Date:**1993

Riley's Farm
California
**Opening Date:**1985

Rock Ledge Ranch
Colorado Springs, Colorado
**Opening Date:**

Ronald V. Jensen Living Historical Farm
Wellsville, Vermont
**Opening Date:**1980

Roth Living Farm Museum
North Wales, Pennsylvania
**Opening Date:**1992

Rough & Tumble Engineers Historical Assoc
Oak Glenn, California
**Opening Date:**1948

Sam Houston Museum
Huntsville, Texas
**Opening Date:**1936

Sauer-Beckmann Living History Farm
Stonewall, Texas
**Opening Date:**1975
Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Museum
Douglas Michigan
Opening Date: 1986

Shellburn Museum
Shellburn, Vermont
Opening Date: 1947

Skinner Farm Museum and Village
Perrysville, Indian
Opening Date: 1983

State Agricultural Heritage Museum
Brookings, South Dakota
Opening Date: 1967

Steamtown National Historic Site
Scranton, Pennsylvania
Opening Date: 1991

Stonefield & Wisconsin State Agricultural Museum
Cassville, Wisconsin
Opening Date: 1969

Strawberry Banke
Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Opening Date: 1965

Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer
Grand Island, Nebraska
Opening Date: 1961

Tannenbaum Historic Park
Greensboro, North Carolina
Opening Date: 1988

Tennessee Agricultural Museum
Nashville, Tennessee
Opening Date: 1979

Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation
Charlottesville, Virginia
Opening Date: 1923

Wade House & Wesley Jung Carriage Museum
Greenbush, Wisconsin
Opening Date: 1953

Waterloo Village
Stanhope, New Jersey
Opening Date: 1964

Watkins Woolen Mill
Lawson, Missouri
Opening Date: 1958

Wessels Living History Farm Project
York, Nebraska
Opening Date: 2002

Westville Village
Lumpkin, Georgia
Opening Date: 1968
APPENDIX B

Experimental Archaeological Sites

The sites listed in this appendix all have some form of ongoing archaeological digs that are open to some extent to the public or hands-on programs recreating and utilizing ancient artifacts. Included are the city and states or country where they are located.
EXPERIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Archaeology in Annapolis
Annapolis, Maryland

Shumla School Experimental Archeology
Comstock, Texas

Brigantium
Northumberland, England

Stone Age Reference Collection
Oslo, Norway

Burnham Experimental Archaeology Group
Burnham, England

Butser Ancient Farm
Waterlooville, England

Cornwall's Celtic Village
Cornwall, England

Duepple Village Archeological Museum
Zehlendorf, Poland

Lejre Experimental Centre
Lejre, Denmark

Lothene Experimental Archaeology
Edinburgh, Scotland

Meadowcroft Rockshelter
Avella, Pennsylvania

Nordic Underwater Archaeology
Riksantikvaren, Norway