

PRESERVATION BEGINS AT HOME

by

Danielle Marie Kahler

(Under the Long Distance Direction of John C. Waters)

ABSTRACT

Interpretation is an important part of the operation of a historic house museum. A well presented, thematic tour can make for an exciting visit. The driving force behind the interpretation is usually the reason why the house was conceived as a museum. Using only information that a tourist could obtain, this study observed the tours of three house museums in Richmond, Virginia: Agecroft Hall, Virginia House and Wilton House. These tours were then compared to a set of interpretation standards defined through the research. By understanding this general examination, several suggestions were made regarding interpretation at house museums in the United States as well as the three visited house museums. Updating interpretation plans are crucial to gaining new visitors.

INDEX WORDS: Historic house museums; Interpretation; Thematic tours; Tour interpretation standards; Historic preservation; Tour guides

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FORWARD

One of the reasons I chose to pursue a degree in Historic Preservation is because of my love of historic places. Beginning at a young age I visited museums and battlegrounds with my family. As a teenager, I was a docent for the York County Historical Society in York, Pennsylvania. This gave me the opportunity to see first hand the training and knowledge that should be imparted to tour guides. During my lifetime, I have visited close to 100 house museums and sites in the Mid-Atlantic region, some outside that region reaching into Kentucky and Georgia. I have eagerly gone through many tours and each time thought of ways that they could be improved.

As a graduate student, I hoped that I would be able to receive an internship with my favorite historic site: Colonial Williamsburg. This was achieved and for about six months I worked on a project to catalogue and research building materials from the various buildings all over the mid and northeastern regions of the United States. My internship with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation was in their Architectural Conservation Department. Most of my time was spent researching objects that were stored in a warehouse and used as study pieces for inspiration when new recreations or restorations were being made. While there, I gained knowledge on the inner workings of the day to day operations of preserving and running such a large architectural collection. In December of 2008, Colonial Williamsburg released my internship advisor, Dr. Thomas Taylor and with him went the funding for the project I was working on.

My supervisor, Dr. Thomas Taylor, would often note that when he received his position in the 1980s there was much work that needed to be done as far as standard preservation and conservation practices. He also had many ideas about what they could do with the interpretation of the buildings to better aid visitors to understand not only the social history, but also the history of the building. Dr. Taylor was a great mentor during my time with the Foundation and helped me to define the scope of my thesis.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Just as memory validates personal identity, history perpetuates collective self-awareness. To understand 'what they are or what they might become'...groups 'define themselves through history as an individual does through memory.'

The Past is a Foreign Country, David Lowenthal

Introduction:

The past is a known value in an increasingly chaotic world. One response to a conflicted present is to look to the past for inspiration. Within the first thirteen years of the twenty-first century alone, the United States has been victim to a terrorist attack, the resulting conflict, natural disasters, and economic recession. The result has been the destruction of cultural icons and the loss of occupational livelihoods. The past is one place where these horrendous events can be put into perspective. History can bring people together through a sense of shared community. Times past, regardless of how idealized, may illustrate how people dealt with similar situations that plague Americans today.

Historic places and buildings help to preserve a sense of familiarity. Historic places are a universal way of enhancing the public memory of its common history and goals. As far back as the Ancient Romans, cultures have used monuments and structures to create an iconography and elicit a shared narrative. Historic places still hold a great deal of power in common memory. Most people in the United States will recognize the White House or the Capitol Building in Washington D.C., just as they will

know certain monuments or buildings within their town or city. These historic buildings help to form and maintain public memory of their history.

While the present does not cease to exist, the past can be used to demonstrate success over trials that are unlike anything Americans currently face. People can look toward our founding fathers and be inspired by what they overcame to create a country blessed with civil liberty. They can see how hard the soldiers fought in the American Civil War for their beliefs. Americans can be proud of the civil rights leaders who secured equal rights for women and all ethnicities. These amazing people and events in American history can be celebrated and used to commemorate what the United States stands for and enable the country to heal, while understanding it's past.

In America, the past is celebrated through multiple means. There are more than 88,000 sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places since its creation in 1966, representing in excess of 1.4 million separate resources, including buildings, sites, districts, structures, and objects ¹ Historic house museums represent a collective memory, enabling the public to see a small part of the past. Not only can a properly operated and interpreted house museum teach visitors about national, local, and ancestral history, it can bring the past to life through creatively displayed exhibitions and tours. For decades, organizations have banded together to save historic homes of important people and events, as well as for their aesthetic significance. Visiting a historic house museum allows a guest to step back in time. Physically being in a home setting, though idealized, puts a visitor in the position to understand the experience of everyday life of past generations.

¹ National Park Service, "National Register of Historic Places Program", *National Park Service*, accessed June 21, 2013, <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/research/>.

House museums offer a unique opportunity to put a person directly in touch with the past. Scenes of hearth and home allow guests to relate to the historical stories being told. Unfortunately many house museums currently suffer from low visitation, insufficient marketing, and lack of funding. In order to keep these testaments of the tangible history, it is necessary to find better means of attracting people to the sites. Bringing a historic house museum back to life should start with re-thinking tour strategies. Many house museums lean toward tours that excessively focus on the collections and trying to fit the history around them. House museums are often saved because of their connection to a wealthy family or famous person. Tours focusing on the head of the house hold, often a male Caucasian, are failing to attract the attention of contemporary visitors. What themes are better for attracting guests? Rethinking what is presented and emphasized in the tour may aid in appealing to broader demographic. By understanding the varied composition of people, who already frequent house museums, the staff can look towards drawing other audiences in by adjusting tours and events to attract larger and more varied groups of people.

Research Goals:

This work includes a brief survey of the history of the historic house museums movement; and interpretation, specifically tours, standards and an assessment of three house museums in Richmond, Virginia. The museums were chosen based on how a guest can access the tours, their unique history and that they were all moved from their original locations and now over look the James River. Two of these houses, Agecroft Hall and Virginia House, were relocated in the 1920s from England. They were both intended to be used as museum spaces when re-constructed. Both structures were

moved to Virginia from England in an attempt to save them from being demolished by the British. While they are not exact replicas of the original buildings much of the original fabric survives and is proudly displayed to those who visit.

Agecroft Hall is a Tudor home that was intended to be a museum set up as it would have been in the Tudor era. The original owners left the property with an endowment, which is still in use, to run and maintain the museum. The house is privately run and operated. Tours can be taken at any time during their open hours, no appointment is necessary. Virginia House was originally intended to become the headquarters for the Virginia Historical Society. An endowment was left to the Historical Society and not specifically for the preservation of the house. The owners' dream of it being the headquarters for the Historical Society was never realized and after the economic downturn in 2008, the museum was closed except by appointment. The third house, Wilton House, was chosen because, while it had been moved from its original location, it had a more typical American history for a house museum. A Georgian style, colonial house, the structure is owned by the Colonial Dames of Virginia. Wilton House is what one expects to experience when visiting a historic house museum.²

Tours were scheduled as part of thesis research. The tour guides were made aware that their guest was a historic preservation master's candidate and later in the tour that the tour may be used as research.³ The most important basis for comparison

² This is based on the authors experience with historic house museums, both visiting and through the research for this thesis. The tour presented for Wilton House is conventional and well thought out.

³ The information that was used is all from places where an ordinary tourist could gain it. Nothing presented in this thesis is from the operations of the museums. This was very important to the author because it would aid in obtaining information that was presented in the same way that the public would see it. In this way, a general observation can be made about what a guest would experience without knowledge of the training process.

was whether or not the standard tour could be adapted for people with varied interests.⁴ Several topics were discussed, including the preservation process for the homes, social history and the importance of the decorative pieces. Interpretation standards as defined by field experts in the field, such as Freeman Tilden, Sam Ham, Larry Beck and Ted Cable, were used for a baseline comparison. The main concepts that are clear through all the documentation on tour interpretation are that a tour should relate to the guest, reveal more than just the facts and provoke thought. Through this research it was possible to make a thorough comparison of what the three houses had to offer the public and discuss what did and do not meet the standards set forth by interpretation authorities in the field. For the purposes of this research, the author wanted to explore what a docent could do when faced with a guest who had a keen interest in history and preservation and whether the tour could be adapted from what is considered a standard tour. All the tour guides were successful, in different ways that as highlighted in Chapter 4.

The topic of house museums is a very broad one. There are a multitude of things that should be considered. For the purposes of this thesis, the scope has been limited to observing tour guides, from the perspective of a guest. The operations of the museum and the training of the tour guides will not be explored. Points for future research include what happens when it is no longer viable for a house to operate as a museum and marketing strategies that could be and are employed by some house museums.

⁴ What a standard tour should offer, as based on literature review, will be discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS

I find...that I have a set of such landmarks – personal, transient, and indelible – that mark the stages of my journeys and the stages of my life. I wait for these particular places on trips year after year; they are all old friends. It is more important than I have ever consciously admitted that they should be where I expect to find them. If they are gone, I have a real and shocking sense of loss. If they have been refurbished I am suffused with joy.⁵

The historic house museum is an institution in America. For more than 100 years such museums have been founded with the intention of preserving the domestic living situations of different classes of the American population. The first house museums were saved through grassroots efforts to commemorate the founding fathers of the United States. The battles that these preservation advocates fought were usually an uphill struggle, facing political turmoil and war. Often, the salvation of a historic home was led by women volunteers with a museum later developed and run by these women as the nature of the site was domestic and therefore perceived as a women's purview. Later, with the popularity of the house museum and the reinvention of other museums, men would take a more active role. There are well over 8000 house museums in the United States.⁶ The origins of the historic house museum go back to the early

⁵ Ada Louise Huxtable. *Architecture Anyone? Cautionary Tales of Building Art*. (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1986). 4.

⁶ Donna Ann Harris. *New Solutions for House Museums: Ensuring the Long-Term Preservation of America's Historic Houses*. (Lanham, Altamira Press, 2007). 8

nineteenth century. While a detailed history of the historic house museum is not needed to understand the worth of these museums, it is important to acknowledge what the impetus is for making a historic house into a museum. The reasons behind creating a museum directly impact the interpretation of a site. The most common reasons, which are wrapped up in the idea of preservation and nostalgia, are usually patriotism or politics.⁷

Patriotism is one of the most popular reasons for converting a house into a museum. The first recorded house museum in the United States was Hasbrouck House at Newburgh, New York, one of General Washington's headquarters during the Revolutionary War. The house was obtained by the state of New York and dedicated on July 4, 1850. George Washington arrived at Hasbrouck House in April of 1782 and stayed there until August of 1783, staying longer at this headquarters than any other during the war. Most notable are the three documents that were drafted by Washington during his stay. Each document written illustrated his desire for a lasting Union with one federal head, a regard to public justice, and a friendly disposition between the citizens where the greater good is the priority. Washington also established the military "Order of the Purple Heart" while staying there in August of 1782. The building itself is mostly original.⁸ The museum also offers exhibits of local historical interest and provides insight into the importance of the headquarters during the Revolution. While bearing the

⁷ This fact can be found in a number of sources, including Patricia West's book *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums*, (Washington D.C., Smithsonian Institute, 1999), vii Jessica Donnelly's Book *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, (Lanham, AltaMira Press, 2002), 1. It is the authors opinion based on site visitations. Most house museums have an element of patriotism or a political social history.

⁸ The information regarding this house was taking from the NPS website. According to the website, the kitchen and dining room floors have been replaced. *Washington's Headquarters (Hasbrouck House)*, National Park Service, Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, accessed May 20, 2013, http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/colonials-patriots/sitec35.htm.

distinction of being the first historic house museum owned by a state, the preservation of this site is not the most significant associated with Washington.

The history of Mount Vernon is a very important mile stone for the entire preservation movement in the United States. Period rooms and collections of noteworthy objects were a growing trend amongst European and American museum makers at the time. The idealization of home and hearth was being perpetuated by public media such as *Godey's Lady's Book* and popular fiction such as Harriett Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852). The designs of Catherine Beecher illustrated the way the home could be used to facilitate a national harmony based on the commonality of the domestic institution as a home, school and church.⁹ The stage was set for social reform, with women wanting to take a greater role outside of the home. As Patricia West states: "if women reformers could use domestic imagery, proposing to 'tidy up our country's house,' in order to vindicate their entrance into the public realm on behalf of 'home protection', the literal 'tidying up' of Washington's house was clearly within the proper bounds of woman's 'sphere.'"¹⁰

As one of the first houses to be preserved as a museum in the United States, Mount Vernon is often used as the premier example. A home of one of America's founding fathers, the house was in a state of disrepair. Taking it as her mission to repair the historic house, Louisa Bird Cunningham decided that it should be the mission of Southern ladies to repair the building and establish it as a shrine to the moral and

⁹ West, *Domesticating History*, 2. West's book is one of the only published sources that details the original house museums' history specifically. Another source for the history of the preservation movement that includes a more summarized history of house museums includes Charles Hosmer's book *Presence of the Past: a History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg*. Donnally's book *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, provides a chapter on the history of historic house museums, 18-42.

¹⁰ Ibid

political virtue of Washington. Ann Pamela Cunningham, her invalid daughter, took over the project and started a movement that gathered together patriotic women from all over the United States, creating a unified goal that stood above the political unrest of the Civil War.¹¹ It is widely recognized as the first national preservation effort. Despite the political unrest during the year leading up to the Civil War, Cunningham was able to gather a large circle of supporters, starting with Southern ladies and later accepting patronage from Northern women as well, to the dismay of many of her Southern friends.

Throughout the history of Mount Vernon's salvation, there were more than a few struggles. Cunningham was attempting to keep it above the political climate of the day but at the same time trying to gain support and donations from both Southern and Northern women.¹² She attempted to highlight that a group related to the founding fathers could rise above the dispute. She developed a tiered management system for those interested in the process, naming herself as Regent with vice regents under her and a lady manager under them.¹³ Cunningham was able to bring together Northern and Southern women to save the house, though they still believed in different things. She believed that Mount Vernon would be a point of unification for the nation.¹⁴ However, she could not stop the destruction of war and the financial and emotional toll it took on the nation. After the war, Cunningham was finally able to come to Mount Vernon to start the restoration process. Funding was limited and tensions were very high

¹¹ Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, A Brief History, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, last modified 2013, accessed May 2013, <http://www.mountvernon.org/visit-his-estate/general-information/about-mount-vernon/mvla/history>

¹² The Mount Vernon Ladies' Associate of the Union, *Historical sketch of Ann Pamela Cunningham*, "The Southern Matron", (Queensborough, The Marion Press, 1911), 19, Google eBook, accessed July 15,

¹³ Patrick H. Butler III, Past, Present and Future, *Chapter 1 in Interpreting Historic House Museums (Lanham, Altamira Press, 2002)*, 21.

¹⁴ The Mount Vernon Ladies' Associate of the Union, *Historical sketch of Ann Pamela Cunningham*, 21-22. In a personal letter, Cunningham's secretary writes that Cunningham believed that the time had come to unify and create a "great moral and political regeneration."

between her and the other regents. When she finally stepped down in 1874, Cunningham praised the efforts of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA) saying, "Let them see that, though we slay our forests, remove our dead, pull down our churches, remove from home to home, till the hearthstone seems to have no resting place in America, let them see that we know how to care for the homes of our hero."¹⁵

Little did she know that the plans she set for the MVLA would lead to a national phenomena. Women's preservation groups arose all over the country. The Ladies Hermitage Association, Mary Galt's Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, the National Association of Colored Women, Louisa May Alcott Memorial Association all emulated MVLA. The success was a sign to most women that there was a place for women in the public venue.¹⁶

The effort made by groups like the MVLA demonstrates the ability of groups of people, particularly women, to come together to preserve our history. Through the years many buildings have been saved and turned into house museums. By 1895 there were twenty museums opened, by 1910 there were more than one hundred and, only twenty years later in the 1930s, there were more than four hundred. By the Bicentennial there were thousands of house museums in operation. Today there is no national standard for reporting the opening of a house museum although rough estimates place the number close to six thousand.¹⁷ Like the revitalization of Mount Vernon, most house museums are the homes of important historical figures or the place of a significant event, mostly related to the founding fathers, former presidents, and men of wealth or famous authors.

¹⁵ The Mount Vernon Ladies' Associate of the Union, *Historical sketch of Ann Pamela Cunningham*, 48.

¹⁶ West, *Domesticating History*, 36

¹⁷ Gerald George, "Historic Property Museums: What are they Preserving", *Preservation Forum* 3, (Summer 1989), 5.

While patriotism played an important role in the decision to make these houses into museums, women's rights, the Americanization of immigrants and eventually civil rights are all political motivations for house museums. Women were taking on an extra role other than the domestic life that was expected of them. They saw interpretation of the domestic life of American heroes as a way to acclimate new immigrants to the way of life in their new country.¹⁸

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the arrival of immigrants from Eastern Europe caused some Americans to feel as if their culture could be threatened. The house museum was seen as a tool to help foster pride for their new country, with the government seeing these shrines to American founding fathers as a way to inspire pride and allegiance. A trip sponsored by the Division for Work with the Foreign Born, under the Wilson administration's Committee on Public Information, took immigrants through Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home. The postwar era fostered a longing for all things American. Historic shrines and collections dedicated to the history of the United States, in particular that of the founding fathers, became popular and the historic house museum was at the center of the patriotic movement.¹⁹

By the time of the United States' Centennial, Americans had caught house museum fever, leading to the creation of numerous sites that celebrated the founding fathers. Women were often leaders in the struggles to save and found these museums.²⁰ They would also help to establish domestic exhibits. Eventually this would

¹⁸ James M. Lindgren, "A Constant Inventive to Patriotic Citizenship": Historic Preservation in Progressive-Era Massachusetts" *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 4, (Dec 1991), accessed July 15, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/366189>, 596.

¹⁹ West, *Domesticating History*, 93.

²⁰ Sandra Riccio and Sue Pringle, "Women and Historic Preservation", *Forum Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 3, (Spring 2002), accessed July 15, 2013, <http://www.preservationnation.org/forum/library/public-articles/women-and-historic-preservation.html>

lead women to volunteer in other arenas, many aiding the U.S. Sanitary Commission, an agency that was set up to help wounded soldiers after the Civil War. These efforts would legitimize the use of women's voluntary organizations by the government and eventually lead to the professionalization and male takeover of museum work.²¹

In 1876, the period rooms set up as a part of the Philadelphia Centennial Expositions drew in nearly ten million people. The enthusiasm that resulted from this heightened interest in the Revolution led to the development of two of Washington's headquarters and Andrew Jackson's Hermitage as house museums by two organizations modeled after the MVLA. In 1888 Mary Galt founded the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA)²², which boasted all female membership with a male advisory board.²³ By the 1890s, "house museums were being established at the rate of about two per year. New museums were accompanied by a wave of patriotic organizations, popular historical pageantry, historical societies, and antique collecting."²⁴ A trend for the focus of house museums can be seen shifting from simply an excitement about American founding fathers, but toward a claim of national loyalty.

The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), founded in 1890 by Mary Lockwood, laid forth objectives that included maintaining the memory of the people involved in the fight for American Independence, enlightening the public about this history, and to foster patriotism and loyalty to the United States.²⁵ declared that their

²¹ West, *Domesticating History*, 49

²² APVA is now known as Preservation Virginia. They currently operate 22 properties that are open to the public and 8 that are available to visit by appointment.

²³ Polly Welts Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice: A History*, (Albuquerque, The University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 46

²⁴ West, *Domesticating History*, 43.

²⁵ National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, *About Us*, DAR National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, last modified 2006, accessed June 5, 2013, <http://www.dar.org/natsociety/history.cfm>

sites would “teach patriotism by erecting monuments and protecting historical spots, by observing historical anniversaries, by promoting the cause of education, especially the study of history, the enlightenment of the foreign people, and all that makes for good citizenship.”²⁶ The DAR was not the only organization to utilize historic preservation as a tool to help immigrants to become American. The Colonial Dames did so as well when they preserved the Van Cortlandt house in upstate New York.²⁷

Preservation was gaining popularity, and as it did, state participation, influence from larger museums and male dominated organizations began to become more prominent. Men began to take over the leadership roles, keeping women in volunteer roles or as low paid workers. Women were also used as interpreters since “in general, a man does not fit well into the role, partly, no doubt, because most historic houses are domestic in character and one naturally expects to find women in them.”²⁸ Larger museums also noted the importance of American decorative arts. Both the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Metropolitan Museum of Art displayed American decorative art collections during the first decade of the twentieth century.²⁹ However, the house museum never lost its elitist appeal and the effort among house museums to have docents well versed in American antiquity increased. The growing influence of men in the field was prevalent in the educational standards seen in the American

²⁶ West, *Domesticating History*, 44. The DAR reiterates West’s statement on their website. The website states that the objectives of the DAR have been the same for the last 100 years and are three fold: historical, educational and patriotic. National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, *About Us*.

²⁷ The Van Cortlandt House is located in Yonkers, New York. It was used by Lafayette, Washington and Rochambeau during the Revolutionary War. This was the first site saved by the Colonial Dames in 1897, just 6 years after their founding in 1891. The Van Cortlandt House, *The National Society of Colonial Dame for the State of New York*, accessed June 5, 2013, <http://www.nscdny.org/headquarters-dumbarton/van-cortland/>

²⁸ West, *Domesticating History*, 49.

²⁹ Edward S. Morse, “If Public Libraries, Why not Public Museums?” *Atlantic Monthly* (July 1893): 774, accessed July 15, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1893/07/if-public-libraries-why-not-public-museums/307027/2/>. This article talks about the importance of collections within the public libraries and how museums at the time needed to clearly interpret and label what they had on display.

Institute of Architects, founded in 1857. Prior to the Progressive Era³⁰, women wrote architectural literature. However, as the educational standards were elevated, women lost their place within the professional world of architecture. One main reason for the growing concern for the ability of women's organizations to manage preservation projects was the restoration of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, early in the twentieth century. Having accepted the free services of T. Mellon Rogers, the DAR was publically attacked by the American Institute of Architects when his work was under par.³¹

As men came to be dominant in the management of the historic house museum movement, Orchard House museum was founded by the Concord Woman's Club to commemorate Louisa May Alcott, author of the novel *Little Women*.³² The Concord Women's Club (CWC), founded in 1895, proudly attributed their establishment to the Sanitary Commission. After the commission had fallen apart, many women were still looking for ways to stay involved. "The establishment of this museum was based on the clubwomen's consciousness of pressing social problems and conservationist impulses toward their solutions."³³ This use of a social organization to further a political agenda was used as a model for future generations of women. Although *Little Women* was not in fact a true story, many of the situations illustrated how women lived during the later

³⁰ The Progressive Era is the time period of social activism and political reform in the United States from the 1890s to the 1920s. One of the main goals was to create a more pure government, accomplished mostly through prohibition and the women's suffragist movement, and to revolutionize every aspect of life. The political reform was a way to weed out the corruption of the so-called Gilded Age. Progressive supporters viewed the family as the foundation of America. Historic house museums would fit into their view on social reform.

³¹ West, *Domesticating History*, 49. West details the role of women in the architectural world, including the role that the DAR's failure with Independence hall played in the doubt towards women ran preservation organizations.

³² The book known as *Little Women* was written in two installments, *Little Women* in 1868 and *Good Wives* in 1869. The reception was widely acclaimed but also criticized for being the beginning of the downfall of traditional women's roles. Many women, after reading the work of fiction, sought out more public identities. Alcott made women's rights central to her writing, especially in *Little Women*.

³³ West, *Domesticating History*, 57, also see "Learn about the Alcotts and Orchard House", *Orchard House*, accessed June 5, 2013, <http://www.louisamayalcott.org/alcottorchard.html>.

decades of the nineteenth century. The CWC used Alcott's *Little Women* as the grounds for restoration, giving emphasis to childhood and the home atmosphere. The interpretation of the museum merged together truth and fiction, representing Alcott's world in *Little Women* while at the same time also being the home of suffragist Louisa May Alcott.³⁴

While the model set by the MVLA was still utilized, there were many differences as well, highlighting the struggles women faced throughout the next decades. The salvation of Monticello demonstrates this in how close Maud Littleton worked with the government to facilitate the preservation of Thomas Jefferson's home. While Cunningham and the MVLA avoided direct interaction with legislators, viewing the Southern government as weak, Littleton utilized the new women's networks and state connections.³⁵ Women were trying to find their place within this newly professionalized field. However, as they clashed with male professionals, both were inextricably drawn toward the same goal: a more active government participation in the preservation realm.

This became a reality during the New Deal era, when the National Park Service (NPS) was founded by the Wilson administration in 1916.³⁶ In the 1930s, the preservation of important historic sites became a national pastime with the founding of Colonial Williamsburg³⁷ and several federal programs instated by the Roosevelt

³⁴ History, *Women's Club of Concord*, accessed June 5, 2013, <http://www.womansclubofconcord.org/About-us.html>.

³⁵ *Jefferson Monroe Levy*, Monticello, accessed June 5, 2013, <http://www.monticello.org/site/house-and-gardens/jefferson-monroe-levy>.

³⁶ The NPS was expanded in 1933. At that time 56 monuments and military sites were transferred to the NPS, which would lead to the development of the national system known today. *History*, National Park Service, accessed May 20, 2013, <http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/history.htm>.

³⁷ In the early 1920s, Rev. W.A.R. Goodwin, with the financial backing of John D. Rockefeller Jr., developed Williamsburg into a living history town. The town became a monument to the Revolutionary lives of not just the local community, but to the men and women who aided in making the United States of free and independent country. Their efforts would become a national standard in the archaeological and

administration's response to the economic crisis.³⁸ As a result, the NPS began to pay attention to historic site, in particular historic house museums, creating a history program within the organization. This resulted in even more professionals coming into the field, almost eliminating the presence of women in leadership roles. The NPS history program was developed with the idea of accentuating public admittance to patriotic sites. However, government policy started to support equal representation of history resulting in a more political perspective for house museums.³⁹

The Carver House museum was founded in 1935 to celebrate the life of George Washington Carver, an African-American scientist, author and educator. Though vastly embellished and in some cases unsubstantiated, Carver's scientific achievements were celebrated by the African-American community. The NPS, upon discovery of Carver's overstated scientific discoveries, worked to squash these facts in fear of alienating the African-American community. This emphasized the importance that was being placed on garnering support from the African American community. The birthplace of Booker T. Washington in Hardy, Virginia was founded during this time of expansion for the NPS, as well. These two monuments would be show an early example of diversity in historic preservation, related to the desire of political parties to garner support from the African-American community.⁴⁰ Many leaders compared Booker T. Washington⁴¹ to the nation's

preservation fields. Olmert, *Official Guide To Colonial Williamsburg*, (Williamsburg, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1998), 22-23.

³⁸ The Historic American Building Survey (HABS) was the first national survey of historic architecture, established in 1933. *Built in America*, The Library of Congress, accessed June 5, 2013, http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/habs_haer/.

³⁹ West, *Domesticating History*, 129.

⁴⁰ West, *Domesticating History*, 136. There was political distress forming in the African-American community, and many politicians recognized the need to help eliminate some of the employment problems, especially in terms of defense jobs. After World War I, several organizations were founded to voice the discontent of African-American soldier and their treatment during the war.

founding father, George Washington, thus giving his life and his house, known as The Oaks, a patriotic meaning as well.

The reason for founding a historic house museum should be directly used in the interpretation plan. For many house museums, the tour interpretation is developed to document the life of an important individual or event.⁴² Others may commemorate a particular style of architecture or a special collection of decorative arts. Each type of house museum applies their founding tenets, the historically important person or event, to determine their interpretive needs. In most cases, it is even written into the mission of the organization.⁴³

⁴¹ Booker T. Washington was a prominent African-American educator, author and advisor to presidents from 1856-1915. Publically he stood by segregation, claiming that now was not the time to fight against it, while privately supporting the challenges presented to the courts. Eventually the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) would challenge his policies and take a more combative standpoint in the Civil Rights movement. Booker T. Washington, The Oaks, *Booker T. Washington, The Oaks*, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/tuskegee/btwoaks.htm>

⁴² Sherry Butcher-Youngans, *Historic House Museums: a Practical Handbook for Their Care, Preservation, and Management*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1993): 184

⁴³ "Developing a Mission Statement", *American Alliance of Museums*, last modified 2012, accessed July 15, 2013, <http://www.aam-us.org/docs/continuum/developing-a-mission-statement-final.pdf?sfvrsn=2>. According to the American Alliance of Museums, a mission statement should explain the purpose for the museum existing. In the case of a house museum, the reason for the salvation of the building is usually a historical figure or event. These people and events are always part of the tour theme.

CHAPTER 3

INTERPRETATION

“History museums are educational institutions that strive to make American past accessible, useful, and meaningful to the millions who view their exhibitions, read their catalogs, and participate in public programs. ... History museums interpret difficult, unpleasant, or controversial episodes, not out of any desire to embarrass, be unpatriotic, or cause pain, but out of a responsibility to convey a fuller, more inclusive history. ... Museums make the greatest contribution to public education when they provide audiences with tools to both celebrate and critically analyze American history.”⁴⁴

The last national study analyzing historic house museums was conducted by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1988. The study showed that there were at least five thousand house museums. According to this study, more than half of the house museums had less than 5,000 guests annually. The majority operated on less than \$50,000 a year and employed no full time staff. These numbers demonstrate some of the struggles faced by historic house museums. Their budgets are so small due to lack of visitation that they are unable to staff the site in order to effectively care for the site.⁴⁵ The main issue that all museums are faced with during this economic down turn

⁴⁴ Donnelly, *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 75. As stated by Lonnie Bunch and Spencer Crew, associate director and director of curatorial affairs for the Smithsonian Institution.

⁴⁵ Cited in Gerald, *Historic House Museum Malaise*, 22. Originally discussed by Peggy Coats, "Survey of Historic House Museums". *History News* Vol. 45 No, 1, 1990, 26–28.

is dwindling attendance.⁴⁶ Individuals have less disposable income and are seeking more value and excitement where they spend their dollars.⁴⁷ Building a new interpretation plan can help to expand the audience and attract a varied clientele. In this way the house museum can meet the needs of a growing community, connecting to contemporary issues and collaborating with non-museum partners and organizations. By reaching out to varying groups of different market segments, the house museum can bring the museum's product, the history and collections, to the consumer, the museum patron, who has a variety of interests but finds enjoyment in history, architecture and collections.⁴⁸

Primary interpretation tools are guided tours, self-guided tours, written materials such as brochures and labels, and permanent exhibits. With these tools alone, a museum can function. Secondary tools, such as published books and articles on the property and history, are just as important and enhance the experience by elevating and decoding the primary content. That content cannot be used alone, relying on the primary data. Such tools as introductory materials, specialized tours or programs, temporary exhibits, demonstrations and reenactments, school field trip programs, and computer based interactions assist with primary data interpretation.⁴⁹

Target audiences are usually identified as those who routinely travel to historic sites. In a report published by The Travel Industry Association of America in 2003,

⁴⁶ James C, Rees, *Forever the Same, Forever Changing: The Dilemma Facing Historic Houses*, (Paper presented at An Athenaeum of Philadelphia Symposium on American House Museums), Dec. 4-5, 1998, accessed May 4, 2011, <http://www.philaathenaeum.org/hmuseum/rees.htm>.

⁴⁷ The author has experience with retail and customer service trends Any field that requires someone to spend their hard-earned money is one that needs to offer the most they can for what the patron is spending.

⁴⁸ John Falk, Visitors: Who Does, Who Doesn't and Why, *Museum News* March/April 1998: 38.

⁴⁹ Barbara Levy, *Great Tours! Thematic Tours and Guide Training for Historic Sites*, (Lanham, AltaMira Press), 7-9. Butcher-Youngmans, *Historic House Museums*, 189-192.

shows that people are attending historic sites, with eighty-one percent of Americans including culture or heritage in trips in 2002, the current trend for historic sites is that attendance is declining.⁵⁰ For this reason it is becoming increasingly more important to reach out to atypical groups to expand the market and encourage new guests. Education initiatives are not just connected to the information. They summarize what the museum wants the guest to experience while at the site and then leave knowing.⁵¹

Drawing guests into a museum begins with a presenting a great guest experience. Barbara Levy, in her book Great Tours: Thematic Tours and Guide Training for Historic Sites, asserts that even a mediocre tour can leave a guest with no memory of the site.⁵² The interpretation of a site should engage guests and enable visitors to recognize the historical importance of the events that took place there. By making the past a tangible part of the present, historic house museums allow guests to experience the past, not just see it.

Many museums feature the head of the household as an important historical figure, placing great importance on their station in local life. This can be seen at popular sites like Mount Vernon or Monticello, where the focus of their tours is on one of the Revolutionary heroes. It is also exhibited at lesser known sites, like Wilton House in Richmond, Virginia or the General Gates house in York, Pennsylvania. Both of these houses have at least one room dedicated to a Revolutionary hero's stay.⁵³ The emphasis is usually placed on the collection of objects housed in the museum, the

⁵⁰ Carolyn Barckett. *Why is Historic Site Visitation Down?* (Forum Journal, Spring 2005, Vol. 19, No. 3)

⁵¹ Donnelly, *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 55

⁵² Levy, *Great Tours!*, xi

⁵³ Wilton House hosted George Washington in their guest room. The General Gates House was the location of the "Toast Heard Around the World" where General Lafayette endorsed George Washington as the leader of the Revolutionary Army, gaining French support toward independence. This is known from the author's time as a docent at the York County Historic Society.

landscape, the architecture or an event that took place at the site. Each of these concepts is but a small part of what makes the site important. Focusing on just one of them does not show the public the intricate domestic history of the site. By themselves they do not make the museum come alive.⁵⁴

Interpretation plans connect the past to the present, offering visitors a link to the past. Historic house museums have removed themselves from the present creating scenes of domestic life set in a past era. The museums are presented as having never been altered from the 'original', something that can be attractive to the public.⁵⁵ Historic buildings can become icons within communities, landmarks that remind the public of their shared history.⁵⁶ This appeal has its limits though. There are so many house museums in the United States that they have become redundant in some areas.

One example of this is in the Philadelphia area. There are more than 200 house museums in five counties. About half of the museums are representations of eighteenth-century domestic architecture with generic interpretations.⁵⁷ There are many more buildings in Philadelphia that also represent this time period. Since all the sites are owned by individual non-profit organizations, there is no governing entity that will prevent another example of eighteenth-century domestic architecture from being converted into historic house museums by local historians, even while those that exist are struggling to survive. Yet the role of women, African-Americans and other ethnicities deserve to be interpreted as well in these domestic settings. According to Richard Moe,

⁵⁴ This is supported by Levy, *Great Tours!*, 37, Donnelly, *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 192-209 and Butcher-Youngmans, *Historic House Museums*, 186-189.

⁵⁵ Donnelly, *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 3

⁵⁶ Ada Louise Huxtable, *Architecture Anyone? Cautionary Tales of Building Art*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986), 4.

⁵⁷ Harris, *New Solutions for House Museums*, 9. Harris notes from personal correspondence with Barbara Silberman, a consultant to the Living Legacy Alternative Stewardship Project.

former director of the National Trust of Historic Preservation, the ultimate preservation goal should be to manage historic sites that epitomize the American experience, representing every aspect of American history including the things that make it diverse.⁵⁸

According to Rosanna Pavoni, some experts question if a dwelling can be viewed as a museum in the same way as a history or art museum. Pavoni argues that the house museum should be separated into a specific type of museumology, where domestic activities can be displayed side by side with the collection without cancelling each other out.⁵⁹ Each house museum may share a common goal, to show a domestic history, but they are all different and cannot fit into a specific standard. Individual house museums have different mission statements, founding tenets, and operations.

Brief History of Interpretation Standards:

Interpretation is not a new concept. Throughout the last one hundred years, several experts have emerged. In the early twentieth century, John Muir, a modern preservationist, helped to define American natural parks as a spiritual benefit for the public. In 1889, Enos Mills, a traveler and nature enthusiast, met Muir who encouraged him to pursue his interests. This led to Mills founding a nature guide school in 1906 and he was the prime motivator for the conservation and interpretation of the Rocky Mountain National Park.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Richard Moe. "Are There Too Many House Museums." *Forum Journal* 27, No 1, (Fall 2012) pp. 55-61.

⁵⁹ Rosanna Pavoni, "Towards a definitions and typology of historic house museums." *Museum International*. (Vol LIII, no 2, April 2001).

⁶⁰ National Parks Service, *Foundations of Interpretation Curriculum Content Narrative*, March 1, 2007, last accessed July 12, 2013, <http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/foundationcurriculum.pdf>.

One of the greatest voices in modern twenty-first century interpretation is Freeman Tilden. Tilden was a newspaper columnist and author, who decided to change his career at the age of 56. He started to work for the NPS at the request of his friend, NPS director Newton Drury. His concern over the quality of the interpretation presented at the various sites he visited. In 1957, Tilden published a groundbreaking book Interpreting Our Heritage. In it he defined six principles of interpretation:

1. 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.
2. Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
6. 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.⁶¹

These six standards were reiterated by Sam Ham of the Center for International Training and Outreach, though he simplified them into four qualities. Interpretation is pleasurable, relevant organized and has a theme.⁶² Larry Beck and Ted Cable expanded on Tilden's six principles in their book Interpretation for the 21st Century (1998). They included fifteen principles, many of which reiterate Tilden's six principles.

1. To spark an interest, interpreters must relate the subject to the lives of visitors.
2. The purpose of interpretation goes beyond providing information to reveal deeper meaning and truth.
3. The interpretive presentation – as a work of art – should be designed as a story that informs, entertains, and enlightens.

⁶¹ Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina Press, 2007), 591 of 3208, Kindle Edition. Tilden's background is detailed in the forward of the book, 133 of 3208 – 244 of 3208.

⁶² National Parks Service, *Foundations of Interpretation Curriculum Content Narrative*, March 1, 2007, last accessed July 12, 2013, <http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/foundationscurriculum.pdf>

4. The purpose of the interpretive story is to inspire and to provoke people to broaden their horizons.
5. Interpretation should present a complete theme or thesis and address the whole person.
6. Interpretation for children, teenagers, and seniors – when these comprise uniform groups – should follow fundamentally different approaches.
7. Every place has a history. Interpreters can bring the past alive to make the present more enjoyable and the future more meaningful.
8. High technology can reveal the world in exciting new ways. However, incorporating this technology into the interpretive program must be done with foresight and care.
9. Interpreters must concern themselves with the quantity and quality (selection and accuracy) of information presented. Focused, well-researched interpretation will be more powerful than a longer discourse.
10. Before applying the arts in interpretation, the interpreter must be familiar with basic communication techniques. Quality interpretation depends on the interpreter's knowledge and skills, which should be developed continually.
11. Interpretive writing should address what readers would like to know, with the authority of wisdom and the humility and care that comes with it.
12. The overall interpretive program must be capable of attracting support – financial, volunteer, political, administrative – whatever support is needed for the program to flourish.
13. Interpretation should instill in people the ability, and the desire to sense the beauty in their surroundings – to provide spiritual uplift and to encourage resource preservation.
14. Interpreters can promote optimal experiences through intentional and thoughtful program and facility design.
15. Passion is the essential ingredient for powerful and effective interpretation – passion for the resource and for those people who come to be inspired by the same.⁶³

Tilden describes each of his six principles in his book, Interpreting our Heritage.

Principle one covers the ability for the tour guide to adapt the tour to the visitor. The interpreter should consider about what makes the visitor come to the site. For principles two, Tilden argues that the interpreter is trying to make the guest envision how the information relates to them, allowing the guest to see things through their own eyes instead of the interpreters. This can take the form of connecting to current events or

⁶³ These principles were published in Beck and Cable's book *Interpretation for the 21st Century*, published in 1998. These principles were taken from the National Parks Service, *Foundations of Interpretation Curriculum Content Narrative*, March 1, 2007, last accessed July 12, 2013, <http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/foundationcurriculum.pdf>.

simply alerting the guest to a how a common chore, for example doing laundry, was done in the past. Principle three contends that interpretation is a form of storytelling that requires skill in the art of presentation of ideas, i.e. the interpreter must be able to give an exciting performance of the information. For principle four, Tilden asserts that interpretation means motivating the visitor to desire more than just the facts, in other words to provoke thought.⁶⁴ Principle five calls for the interpreter to present a whole picture of what the site is.⁶⁵ Principle six covers addressing children in tours.

House museums are difficult to place into a specific set of interpretation standards. Each one has a different mission and individual education goals for their guests. However, upon visiting numerous house museums there appears to be a specific pattern that exists for the tours.⁶⁶ More recent scholarship includes work by Barbara Levy, of Barbara Levy Associates, a consulting firm for interpretation planning and education and Sherry Butcher-Youngmans, a professional in the museum field. Both experts claim the need for museum's educational goals to be highlighted within the mission statement for the organization. They also explain the need for the formation of thematic tours that help to focus tour guides.

Most sources will agree that the tours center on three main components: the material culture, i.e. the furniture and décor of the collections, the social history of the house, and the architecture or landscapes⁶⁷. In order to interpret these features appropriately, many sites will look to Tilden's six principles. Interpretation should relate

⁶⁴ Ibid, principle one: 609 of 3208; principle two ,825-855 of 3208; principle three, 923, 988 of 3208; principle 4, 999 of 3208; principle 5, 1157 of 3208

⁶⁵ Ibid, 1157 of 3208

⁶⁶ The author has visited at least 100 house museums in her lifetime. This allows for her to have some experience regarding what a tour would look like. Using sources like Tilden, Levy, and Beck and Cable, additional key elements were identified.

⁶⁷ See Levy, *Great Tours*, 11; Donnelly, *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 13; Butcher-Youngmans, *Historic House Museums*, 183-184.

to the visitor, should be a revelation not just a sharing of fact, is an art, should provoke thought, should present a whole story, and should not be diluted for children. They have been used in tour planning for many different sites including battlefields, historic house museums, and art, science and history museums.⁶⁸ Using a thematic tour approach, discussed below, and implementing Tilden's more general concepts in regards to interpretation allows a house to museum to represent themselves to diverse audiences. In Chapter 4, the author will assess three tour based the inclusion of the three main concepts present in most tours and on the first five of Tilden's principles. Number six will not be addressed since the author did not have access to a child in order to offer an opinion on the tour guide's ability to change to the tour for the purpose of addressing a younger audience.

The Mission of the Museum:

Having specific education and interpretation objectives written directly into the mission statement will aid in accomplishing those objectives and ultimately the goals of the museum. The mission statement of the Newsome House Museum in Newport News, Virginia states: "The Newsome House Museum & Cultural Center is dedicated to helping present & future generations learn from the past by increasing the awareness and understanding of African American history and culture, with a specific focus on the history of Newport News."⁶⁹ Having specific education and interpretation objectives in the purpose statement will aid curators or directors in compiling an interesting and educational tour that will fulfill the goals of the museum. The Newsome House has

⁶⁸Heritage Destination Consulting, "Freeman Tilden: Father of Heritage Interpretation," *Heritage Destination Consulting*, last updated 2013, accessed July 10, 2013, <http://www.heritagedestination.com/freeman-tilden.aspx>.

⁶⁹ Newsome House Museum and Cultural Center, accessed April 14, 2012 <http://www.newsomehouse.org/index.php>.

educational programs featuring the life of Joseph Newsome (1869 – 1942), a prominent African American attorney born to slave parents, segregation and the beginnings of the Civil Rights movement, as well as the involvement of women in the Civil War and Reconstruction Eras.⁷⁰ Through all of these programs, the Newsome House is able to achieve their goal of teaching the public about the African American history of Newport News.

Having a plan for the educational experience is important. Levy notes that “no matter what the size of the site or scope of the plan...every interpretation plan must express a clear sense of what the site wants visitors to learn and experience and how they will accomplish and measure this.”⁷¹ The process of planning begins with looking inward and appraising what already exists and what needs to be added. A museum should identify what resources are available to aid in the interpretation, including collections, research and previous reports, access to the museum, staffing and the target audience. After all existing materials are taken into consideration; an evaluation should be made to see what works and what does not. This process should clearly set forth the educational purpose for the museum and define whether future research is needed to meet the education and interpretation goals⁷². In some cases this may mean that the museum will need to redefine their mission statement.⁷³

⁷⁰ Calendar of Events, Newsome House Museum and Cultural Center, accessed April 14, 2012 <http://www.newsomeshouse.org/index.php>.

⁷¹ Levy, “Interpretation Planning: Why and How”, in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Donnelly, (Lanham, AltaMira Press, 2002) 44.

⁷² Levy, *Great Tours!*, 23.

⁷³ American Alliance of Museums, “Developing a mission statement.”

Thematic Tours:

Interpretation of a collection and site can take many forms. This includes guided tours, self-guided tours, exhibits, living history, and audio tours. Some sites and museums will offer a self-guided tour. The advantages to this style of tour are that the guest is allowed to move at their own pace and learn more about the sections of the museum they have the most interest in.⁷⁴ For historic house museums guided tours are almost always used, primarily to protect the collection. To ensure the feeling of domestic tranquility, many historic house museums do not rope off their exhibits. Using a guide can lessen the risk of damaging material culture; there can be high risk of damage if patrons were allowed to wander at will. In addition to the security that a guided tour offers, the ability to have person to person interactions is important to historic homes. A guided tour can be good to showcase the museum's story. Guided tours can be an opportunity for a historic site or can be a serious detriment. A good tour will bring life to the historic site and leave visitors with a sense of the past and how it relates to the present. According to Levy, when a guest experiences a poorly conducted tour, they will forget the information that was presented and not understand the importance of the site.⁷⁵

The mode of presentation to the public further demonstrates what is important about the site and highlights key elements of the site's history. Several years ago, many sites, such as Drayton Hall and Cliveden, recognized why it is vital to identify these elements and plan a tour that emphasizes the main points of the sites' history, in other

⁷⁴ Butcher-Youngmans, *Historic House Museums*, 208-212

⁷⁵ Levy, *Great Tours!*, 3. Levy details the reasons why a guided tour is beneficial to a house museum. She also discusses the ways in which a good, bad or mediocre tour can affect the visitor.

words a themed tour.⁷⁶ A disorganized tour covering too much information is just as unappealing as a tour covering too little. Planning a themed interpretation helps to focus tour guides. The amount of information can be overwhelming for a guide. Knowing not only the time period but also the material culture and basis for the collection displayed in the rooms is a huge challenge. When a theme is identified it helps the guide ensure that the key points are covered during the tour and prevents them from becoming overwhelmed.

Having a series of larger topics that can lead to the discussion and inclusion of smaller subjects is advised by Levy as it “provides the opportunity to repeat the key ideas several times. When done creatively, this process is easy to follow because it is organized and reinforces the major concepts.”⁷⁷ Museums that have good interpretation plans recognize that people learn better when they can relate to what they are learning, reach out to people on all developmental levels and are creative and engaging in interpretive media and delivery of the information. Levy considers Drayton Hall an example of a tour that is successful. The guides help their guests by discussing what has been seen in previous rooms. They ask visitors questions to determine the direction that the tour should take, allowing the tours to be flexible to the needs of the guest.⁷⁸

When the theme or themes have been determined, Levy says that the next step is to identify where each theme should be presented.⁷⁹ Most museums will have three to five story lines that they wish to convey to their guests. It is recommended that a team be established to finalize the interpretation plan. To determine the location in the

⁷⁶ Levy, “Historic House Tours That Succeed”, in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Donnelly, (Lanham, Altamira Press, 2002), 192-209.

⁷⁷ Levy, *Great Tours!*, 4.

⁷⁸ Levy, “Historic House Tours that Succeed”, 198.

⁷⁹ Levy, *Great Tours!*, 45-46

museum where the 'theme' should be talked about is best done within the actual space. The team can then identify what material culture should be available within the space to illustrate the theme.

Since the concept of a house museum is generally to show domestic history, displaying a pristine household is not an effective way of communicating social history. After interpretation tools are selected, identifying how to implement them is crucial to helping the audience understand what is important. Levy suggests that there are several ways to portray a lived in space: objects to show clutter, living history to demonstrate what types of activities could take place at the house. Levy argues that sites should be creative and really think about what their guests should experience at the site.⁸⁰

When it comes to implementation, sites should recognize which principle of the plan is the most important to be put into action first. Historic house museums often have issues with funding, hence changing or implementing a complete new interpretation strategy, all at one time, may be cost prohibitive. Having a phased schedule for implementation will aid the museum in effectively presenting their story to the public. Deciding where to start, where to finish and how to effectively draw in the audience is imperative to the value and success of the interpretation. Upon implementation, the plan then needs to be evaluated. This should be worked into the timeline in case modifications need to be applied. The work of planning or re-planning an interpretation policy can seem daunting. However, completing the process helps to ensure that the

⁸⁰ Ibid

objective or mission of the museum is being portrayed to guests in a way that highlights the aspects of the history the museum wants people to remember.⁸¹

Conflicted Pasts:

In many ways, the historic house museum stands at a precipice. The way that the past is presented at these sites should routinely be reinterpreted to include things that have been overlooked in the past.⁸² Traditionally, the past is presented in a very specific way. In many cases there is a reason for the exclusion of certain topics. At the time when a museum was founded, there may have been social and political restrictions for not telling people about conflicted pasts, such as slavery. When Mount Vernon was founded by the MVLA, the inclusion of the history of slavery at the site would not have been viewed positively by most of the public due to the political and social climate of the Civil War. Until after the civil rights movement in the 1960s, this notion of incorporating conflicted ethnic histories would have been met with disdain from a large portion of the American population.

Many house museums have started to incorporate the role slavery played at their site or the role of women.⁸³ Several steps have been taken to include minority history in tour interpretation. At Historic Stagville Plantation in Durham, North Carolina, for example, the inclusion of slave history helped their attendance numbers double from

⁸¹ Levy's book *Great Tours!*, helps to establish a standard for establishing themed tours. In the book she details this process. Butcher-Young's book, *Historic House Museums*, also has a plan for establishing tours. The authors that contributed to *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, also talk about the different interpretation strategy. Many concepts presented in the themed tour section are described in all three sources.

⁸² Rex Ellis, *Interpreting the Whole House*, in *Interpreting Historic House Museums* ed. By Jessica Donnelly, (Lanham, Altamira Press), 61-80

⁸³ For information regarding the inclusion of African-American history see Rex M. Ellis, "Interpreting the Whole House", in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Donnelly, (Lanham, Altamira Press, 2002), 61-80. The inclusion of women in interpretation is discussed by Debra A. Reid, "Making Gender Matter: Interpreting Male and Female Roles in Historic House Museums, in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, (Lanham, Altamira Press, 2002), 81-127

2007 to 2008⁸⁴ Poplar Forest, Thomas Jefferson's retreat, has also included slave history in their tours with the recreation of the kitchen wing. Jefferson enjoyed dining with his family on the roof of the kitchen which will be reenacted by interpreters with traditionally cooked meals in the kitchen, allowing guests to see firsthand what Jefferson's life was like.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Historian, *Never mind the slavery, have you dipped a candle yet*, (The Historian: History and Sexual Politics, 11492 to Present, 2009) <http://www.historiann.com/2009/02/12/never-mind-the-slavery-have-you-dipped-a-candle-yet/>

⁸⁵ The author gained this information from touring Poplar Forest in the Spring of 2007.

CHAPTER 4

ASSESSING HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS

To analyze the interpretation of historic house museums, three active house museums were chosen in Richmond, Virginia to tour, observe and compare based on the interpretation standards set by authority figures within the field, particularly Freeman Tilden. These museums were selected first based on the ease of access for tours and second because each one was moved from the original location.. **Agecroft Hall** and **Virginia House** were selected first. They are unique to house museums, since they were moved from England to the United States and were reconstructed with the intention for them to be used as museum spaces.



Figure 1: Map of House Museums: A. Agecroft Hall, B. Virginia House, C. Wilton House⁸⁶

⁸⁶ (Google Maps, 2013)

Agecroft Hall, relocated to the United States from England in 1926, has paid interpreters and is available for tours 5 days a week from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. Mr. Williams relocated the house to the United States from England and created an endowment in his will for the house to become a museum. Virginia House is only available for tours by appointment for both the gardens and the house itself. The museum is operated by the Virginia Historical Society. Lastly, the **Wilton House** is headquarters for the Virginia Dames, the state branch of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America. The house was moved by the Virginia Dames from its original location, further up the James River. The museum uses volunteer docents as their tour guides.

Observation Points and Research Goals:

All of the information that was gathered about these museums came from what an average tourist would have available to them using the internet, the tour guide, and publicly accessible published materials available for each museum. The management staff for the museums was not spoken to because of the desire to focus on the tours and what the tours looked like as compared to the industry standard, per Tilden and other authorities.⁸⁷ With such slight amounts of information, it was decided that the comparison of these three sites would be from a tourist's perspective. Observing them from the eyes of a tourist presented the opportunity to see if there are issues that can be addressed. The tours were compared applying several general points of observation to each.

First, the ease of taking a tour for each museum was considered. This is very important to the operation of a museum. If a guest has to make an appointment to visit a site, it is harder for the museum to garner the support of the community let alone

⁸⁷ See Chapter 3.

tourists who visit the city. Second, was the theme of the tour, whether it was based on social history, material culture, the landscape or the architecture. After these general points, a comparison of the tour guides was made. Were they friendly, knowledgeable, able to adapt, professional and offering encouragement for questions and discussion? It was revealed to each tour guide that their guest was a master's candidate for a degree in historic preservation, studying historic house museums. For the tours, the author was the only guest and disclosed a proclivity for history to see if they were able to adapt the tour for the type of visitor they had. When a tour guide is knowledgeable enough to modify a tour to the type of audience they have, it makes for a better tour and a better experience for the guest. The basic concepts of customer service in any field will explain that it is essential to give the guest what they want and adapt what is known to better serve them. In addition to the ability to adapt, the tour guide should encourage guests to ask questions about the site, be knowledgeable with answers, and know where to find the answers when they don't know them. They should be friendly and inviting.

For each tour, several main concepts were observed: First was how the decorative arts were talked about and included in the tour; second, how well the social history of the time period was represented; third, how the architecture, landscapes and preservation were included as part of the tour; and finally, the way in which the tour guide was able to adapt the tour for their audience as related to interpretive tour standards outlined by Tilden in Chapter 3.

History:

Agecroft Hall:



Figure 2: Agecroft Hall, façade facing the James River⁸⁸

Agecroft Hall is a Tudor revival home built from the original 14th century building materials. The original Agecroft Hall stood near Manchester, England in Lancashire. The original land title, which is now housed in Agecroft Hall's archives, is dated to 1376.⁸⁹ Robert Langley built the original manor home around 1500. In 1561, Sir Robert Langley III died, leaving Agecroft and the lands to his daughter who married William Dautesey of London approximately ten years later, at which time the house and lands passed to him. The hall, which eventually quadrupled in size, was home to nine generations of Langley's and ten generations of Dautesey's.⁹⁰

The hall expanded to form a large square structure with a courtyard in the middle by the late 16th century. There were more than 20 rooms in the final construction, "including a great hall, great parlor, dining parlor, kitchen, sleeping chambers and a

⁸⁸ Photo by author

⁸⁹ Lisa Crutchfield. *Agecroft Hall*. (Richmond: Agecroft Association, 2012), 9.

⁹⁰ Crutchfield, *Agecroft*, 9

private chapel.”⁹¹ Later, coal mining near the house and railroad tracks that ran through the property during the 19th century led to the swift decline of the house, especially its stone foundations. The original interior was damaged from attempts to update and modernize Agecroft Hall in 1867 and, again in 1894, after a fire ravaged the south and west wings of the hall. The residents left the house unoccupied in 1904 and after several attempts to donate the house to Lancashire, the last Dauntesey heir decided to sell the manor in 1925.⁹²

At that time, a wealthy American entrepreneur Thomas C. Williams, was endeavoring to build a community that would mirror an English village on part of his family farm known as Windsor in Richmond, Virginia.⁹³ He and his architect, Henry G. Morse, bought Agecroft Hall for \$19,000. Their plan was to dismantle the estate, and rebuild it as the center of Williams’ new community and as a home for he and his wife, Elizabeth. Williams’ did not acquire the house easily. A large debate, in which Sir Winston Churchill participated, was held in Parliament on whether to allow the hall to leave England.⁹⁴ The end result was that the building was not faring well in England, mainly due to coal mining, and perhaps a new life in the United States was a better outcome than being destroyed in its home country.

Much effort was put into disassembling the manor. Each piece was catalogued before being placed in a crate to be transported by sea to the United States. Amazingly enough, everything including the four-ton case of original leaded glass arrived in

⁹¹ Crutchfield, *Agecroft*, 9

⁹² Crutchfield, *Agecroft*, 10

⁹³ According to the tour guide, due to the Great Depression and high costs of building a home in the community, Williams’ died before the development of the neighborhood into his Tudor Village. When homes were built in the area, Colonial Revival was a more popular style.

⁹⁴ Crutchfield, *Agecroft*, 10.

America unbroken.⁹⁵ Even currently, the large glass window that looks out into a small courtyard off the office and book store is almost completely original with only a few pieces having been replaced due to a hurricane in the 1980s. Each replacement piece was probably hand-crafted in Jamestown, Virginia, evidenced by the green tint to the glass although this is not documented.⁹⁶ It is important to note, that Williams never had any intention of recreating Agecroft Hall exactly as it had been in Lancashire. He always meant for the house to be a modern home with electricity and indoor plumbing, which was something Elizabeth demanded. The reconstruction took two years and cost approximately \$250,000.⁹⁷

The couple moved into their home in 1928. A year later, Williams died and left the property to his wife stipulating that, while his wife could live out her days in the house he had built for her, when she died or moved out of the house, Agecroft Hall would become a museum.⁹⁸ Along with this edict, he also left a generous endowment, which the museum still operates off of today.⁹⁹ A few years after his death, Elizabeth remarried Dr. David Morton and together they lived in Agecroft Hall, becoming known in Richmond for their lavish events held at the Hall. Since Dr. Morton worked at the Virginia Veterans Hospital, many of these events were in honor of the Veterans he worked with there.¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth lived in the Hall until 1967, when she decided to relocate, leaving thirty-five period pieces to be used in the future museum, which opened in 1969. Elizabeth visited the museum until her death in 1984. She stipulated

⁹⁵ Crutchfield, *Agecroft*, 10

⁹⁶ The information about the glass was shared with the author by the tour guide.

⁹⁷ Crutchfield, *Agecroft*, 13.

⁹⁸ This information was shared with the author by the tour guide. Also see, Crutchfield, *Agecroft*, 13.

⁹⁹ Information regarding the endowment came from the tour guide.

¹⁰⁰ Crutchfield, *Agecroft*, 13. The tour guide revealed that there are still people surviving that attended these functions and will visit the house to share stories about their experiences.

that the library should remain as it was while she lived there and featured Williams' collection of 3,800 books. Additional pieces were acquired for the museum collections, all of which are authentic to the Tudor or early Stuart periods (1485-1660).¹⁰¹ While the collections are all period significant pieces, they represent what the elite would have had available to them, not what the Langley's or Dautesey's would have owned.¹⁰²

The exterior of the house is architecturally similar to the original Agecroft. The original stone foundation was used to bear the weight of the house. Most of the wood is original English oak with very few replica pieces. The brick and stucco portions between the timbers were built to replicate the original construction.¹⁰³ The roof is mostly original. The large entrance gates are now housed in an archway. The lower floors of the interior were created using portions of the original interior wood work.¹⁰⁴ For the purposes of the museum's tour there is a great hall, parlor, dining hall, two sleeping chambers, a gentleman's study, storage and servant's quarters.¹⁰⁵ The storage and servant spaces were recreated and located where the modern bathrooms had been, allowing visitors to see a part of the everyday lives of the medieval Englishman.¹⁰⁶

Among the furnishings in the house are some exquisite examples of 17th century pieces.¹⁰⁷ The house boasts three beds. One is painted in an oriental style with a matching chest, making it a rare find for any museum. In one of the bed chambers there

¹⁰¹ Crutchfield, *Agecroft*, 13. The tour guide also talked at length about the pieces and how they were collected by or donated to the museum.

¹⁰² The tour guide indicated that while the Dautesey's would have aspired to present themselves as wealthy nobles, they were not and would not have been able to afford some of the decorative pieces in the house.

¹⁰³ Crutchfield, *Agecroft*, 15. This was discussed as part of the tour. The half-timbered sections of the house were meant to mirror the original structure as closely as possible.

¹⁰⁴ Crutchfield, *Agecroft*, 15-16.

¹⁰⁵ The layout of the museum was observed while on the tour.

¹⁰⁶ The servants quarters was discussed as part of the tour.

¹⁰⁷ Crutchfield, *Agecroft*, 13

is a laundry tracker, an everyday instrument meant to enable a servant to know how many of each piece she took to be washed. According to the tour guide, this piece is one of the most valuable pieces in the museum because of its rarity.¹⁰⁸ Along with furniture, Agecroft has a large archive of written documents. On display there are the titles and land deeds for the property. Additionally, they have an Elizabethan pardon for Sir Robert Langley, who practiced Catholicism and bought a pardon from Elizabeth I. According to the tour guide, this piece was relinquished with some hesitation to the museum and was presented to them rolled up in a ball. The parchment had to be sent to Colonial Williamsburg's laboratories in order for it to be humidified and flattened.¹⁰⁹

Virginia House:



Figure 3: Virginia House, façade facing Sulgrave Road.¹¹⁰

Virginia House is Tudor Revival home that was moved from England to the United States, and completed just months prior to the stock market crash in 1929.¹¹¹

The materials used to construct the original home were from the Priory of the

¹⁰⁸ Information regarding the furniture was shared with the author by the tour guide.

¹⁰⁹ This information comes from the tour guide and what was observed during the tour.

¹¹⁰ Photo by author

¹¹¹ This information came from the tour guide.

Augustinian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem, better known as the Priory of Warwick, built in 1119. The Order was formed by Henry de Newburgh, first earl of Warwick. In 1536, King Henry VIII broke from the Catholic Church and confiscated the Priory of Warwick along with hundreds of other monasteries and nunneries. The property was sold to Thomas Hawkins, alias Fisher. Fisher built a Tudor manor house on the site of the Priory, where he entertained Elizabeth I. The manor changed hands several times during the next centuries until the Lloyd banking family bought it in the mid-nineteenth century, becoming Virginia House.¹¹²

In 1925, Alexander and Virginia Weddell, bought the Priory at a demolition sale. Alexander was a diplomat who, over the course of his career, worked in Calcutta and Mexico, the influences of which can be seen through the furnishing of the house. The house was taken apart with a small detonation in the middle of the building.¹¹³ Most of the stones survived and were packed up and shipped it to the United States. Fragile ornamental pieces were shipped in boxes with sand to cushion them. During the voyage, the ship began taking on water, which soaked the stones. Once in Richmond, they had to be washed and dried.¹¹⁴ The architect of Virginia House, Henry Grant Morse, traveled with the Weddell's to decide what buildings to use as archetype for the house. The west wing of the house is a reproduction of Sulgrave Manor, a house in Northamptonshire, England, owned by an ancestor of George Washington. The Priory was reproduced in the center portion of the house, adopting several attributes seen in

¹¹² "Virginia House", Virginia Historical Society, accessed July 11, 2013, http://www.vahistorical.org/vh/virginia_house01.htm. The information for this section came from the website. Virginia House does not have a published book or pamphlet.

¹¹³ Virginia Historical Society, "Virginia House", *iii. Packing and shipping*.

¹¹⁴ Virginia Historical Society, "Virginia House", *iv. Construction and Design*. The tour guide also discussed the shipping issues. According to her, the ships had to turn back to England so that they would not sink with their cargo.

English Low Country manors. The east wing of the Virginia House was modeled after Wormleighton Manor, an estate owned by the Spencer-Churchill family.¹¹⁵

The couple had hoped that the west wing of the house would be used as a museum for the Virginia Historical Society and the rest would be the headquarters for the Society. The basement was set up to be used as archives and labs. In 1929 the house was officially deeded to the Historical Society with a provision that the Weddell's could reside there until they died.¹¹⁶ The Virginia Historical Society claimed sole ownership of the property in 1948, when the couple died in a train crash on New Year's Day. Currently the museum and gardens are open by appointment only. The site can also be rented for meetings and special events. During the year there are several special events, including Behind-the-Scenes tours, garden tours and teas.¹¹⁷

The Weddell's collected furniture for the house. In the great hall, most of the pieces are original to Warwick Priory, found by Charles Duveen, a London antiques dealer. Otherwise, the pieces used throughout the house were collected by the Weddell's while traveling.¹¹⁸ The house was never intended to be a museum. When it was decided to open it to the public for tours, the house was furnished as the Weddell's left it. One room is furnished as a Tudor style guest room.¹¹⁹ Inside the house, the modern electrical lighting and central heating were masked by brass pieces carved to look like Elizabethan shields. Lighting fixtures used vellum cut from original missals,

¹¹⁵ Virginia Historical Society, "Virginia House", *iv. Construction and Design*.

¹¹⁶ This information came from the tour guide.

¹¹⁷ Virginia Historical Society, "Virginia House", *vi. House Museum*.

¹¹⁸ Virginia Historical Society, "Virginia House", *vi. House Museum, a. Great Hall*.

¹¹⁹ Information regarding the transition from house to museum came from the tour guide.

something that would never happen today.¹²⁰ The Library houses ten thousand volumes including several original medieval manuscripts that are on display. There is also an old 1920's radio in the Library.¹²¹

Wilton House:



Figure 4: Wilton House, façade facing the James River¹²²

Wilton House was built around 1753 for William Randolph III.¹²³ The Randolph family is well known throughout Virginia, in particular Peyton Randolph of Williamsburg. Peyton, though once attorney general for the colony of Virginia and directly serving the Crown, was elected chairman of the Continental Congress and eventually found himself on the rebel execution list.¹²⁴ Originally the house was located on a 2,000 acre working

¹²⁰ Virginia Historical Society, "Virginia House", *vi. House Museum, a. Great Hall.*

¹²¹ Virginia Historical Society, "Virginia House", *vi. House Museum, e. Library.*

¹²² Photo by author

¹²³ "About Wilton House", Wilton House Museum, last modified 2013, accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.wiltonhousemuseum.org/about-us/wilton-house/>.

¹²⁴ This information was learned during the author's internship with Colonial Williamsburg. Also see Olmert, *Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg*, 107

tobacco plantation, further up the James River from where it currently resides. In 1775, George Washington stayed at Wilton. During the Revolutionary War, the house was used as a headquarters for Lafayette up until the end of the war.¹²⁵

For 100 years, Wilton was held by the Randolph family, passing down from one generation to the next. However in 1859 the plantation was sold to Col. William C, Knight in an effort to eliminate part of the family's debt.¹²⁶ Wilton made it through the Civil War without being burned by the North. Afterward there were several owners until 1932, when The Bank of Commerce and Trust foreclosed on the property. The Bank planned on dismantling the old plantation home, which outraged The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America (NSCDA). In 1932 the Dames bought the house and raised money to move the house to a new location on a canal of the James River after the original site was re-zoned.¹²⁷ Upon completion, the house was used as the headquarters for the Virginia Dames and continues to be used in this capacity today.¹²⁸

The rooms of Wilton House contain more than 1400 objects that represent the 17th through 19th century. Pieces in the house are based on an inventory that was taken in the 19th century, before the Randolph family left the property. The most expensive piece was a pianoforte, which the museum was graciously given for use in the formal

¹²⁵ Wilton House Museum, "About Wilton House." This was discussed by the tour guide as well. During the conversation about conflicted pasts, the tour guide talked about a letter that Lafayette wrote regarding one of the slaves at Wilton House.

¹²⁶ Wilton House Museum, "About Wilton House."

¹²⁷ Wilton House Museum, "About Wilton House." The tour guide talked briefly about the move up the James River.

¹²⁸ This was shared with the author by the tour guide. Also see Wilton House Museum, "About Wilton House." The NSCDA is a leader in historic preservation, restoration and interpretation of historic sites. Their first property was the Van Cortlandt House in New York, purchased in 1897. Since then they have acquired 41 properties, thirteen museum collections and 30 properties that are supported by the Dames.

parlor on the first floor.¹²⁹ The items found in the house can be browsed at the American Heritage website.¹³⁰

Tour Assessment:

As discussed in Chapter 3, there are several key themes that are observed in the tours for most house museums. These include material culture and collections, social history of the site and the architecture, landscapes and preservation of the site. These topics are used in the development of a thematic tour. Additionally the tours were assessed using five of Tilden's six principles of interpretation:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or being described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile. Information, as such, is not interpretation.
2. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
3. Interpretation is an art which combines many arts whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.¹³¹

In the following section, there will be a description of the collections, social history and architecture, preservation and landscapes for each of the properties. The author will also briefly discuss how the tour guides met or did not meet the five standards set by Tilden and listed above.

¹²⁹ Information regarding the collection was shared with the author by the tour guide.

¹³⁰ See "Wilton House Museum", American Heritage Collections, Travel, and Great Writing On History, last modified 2011, accessed July 20, 2013
<http://www.americanheritage.com/content/wilton-house-museum?nid=20618>.

¹³¹ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 662-676 of 3208.

Agecroft Hall:

The visit took place on January 24, 2013. Upon arriving at the museum, the visitor walks into the visitor's center. They offer an immediate greeting and ask about interest in a tour. From here, the tour starts in an adjoining room, where an introductory video is presented with general history information about the site, much of which is presented above. The female tour guide was interested in what brought her guest to Agecroft Hall and asked questions to develop an understanding of their tour needs. Following the short introductory video, the tour of the interior was started. The tour guide made it a point to share that she was going to adapt her normal tour to include more about the material culture than the social history since the guest was interested in preservation.¹³²

Material Culture and collections:

The furniture and décor are a significant part of the tour at Agecroft. Since the tour is focused on the Tudor history of the original structure, the pieces in the house are significant to that interpretation. For the tour, each piece was talked about extensively. The tour guide shared that it would have been highly unusual for the original owners of the house to have owned such prized pieces, including the three beds and large chest that the museum has on display.

In the entry to the museum, there are several Tudor suits of armor. In the great hall, there is a Germanic panel that depicts noblemen, though the origins of the piece are not known.¹³³ In the downstairs living quarters, there is a combination chair and

¹³² The author has also been on a conventional tour of this museum. The tour guide for this tour was able to completely alter the 'scripted' tour for her audience.

¹³³ According to the tour guide, the piece is definitely Germanic, but the identities of the noblemen in the relief are not known.

table that could be used as a service table for the bed or as an additional seat for guests. There is also an original King James Bible and several other books and paintings. In the dining room, the museum has Tudor knives and spoons. The tour guide explained that the people of the Tudor period did not use forks because they were a sign of the devil.

Social History:

The collections at Agecroft directly support the social history that is shared as part of the tour. While it was not dwelled on during the tour used in this research, it is certainly something the tour guide knew about extensively. For example, upstairs, where the modern bathrooms would have been, are now recreated servants quarters, complete with a priest hole. Since Catholicism was illegal, if a priest sought refuge with a sympathetic family, the house would have a place for the priest to hide if the authorities came.

Much of what she talked with the author about was the social history of the Williams' and how much effort was put into adapting the house to meet Mrs. Williams' standards of living. She spoke on the Tudor time period briefly, choosing to talk more about the Williams' role in Richmond society, in particular Mrs. Williams', who served as a great patron of the towns veterans and organized many social activities for the surrounding community.

Architecture, preservation and landscapes:

The guide was knowledgeable about the architecture and preservation efforts. For instance, in each room she talked about how Williams' hid the modern heating, and pointed out where there were secret panels and rooms to hide modern conveniences

such as a telephone or light switch. She was able to discuss how the house was moved from Great Britain to the United States, including how things were packed up for the journey. She shared that the Williams' architect did not expect many of the pieces to arrive intact. They were, according to the tour guide, excited to see that the panes of glass survived. They are now proudly displayed throughout the house, though several panes were damaged by a hurricane. These panes were replaced by ones that were probably made at Jamestown.¹³⁴ The window is now bowing slightly and needs more reinforcement. The gardens are toured at a guest's leisure with no guide, though they have a map that details specific locations along a garden walk.



Figure 5: Example of original Tudor glass with Dauntsey crest and Langley seal¹³⁵

¹³⁴ This assertion, made by the guide, comes from the green tint to the glass. This is typical of glass made at Jamestown. See "How It's Made", Jamestown Glassworks, last modified 2008, <http://www.jamestownglasshouse.com/How.html>.

¹³⁵ Photo by author

Agecroft and the Interpretation Standards:

The tour guide for Agecroft Hall met three of the five standards established by Tilden.

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or being described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

The tour guide met this standard. She was able to appeal to her guest's interests in history, the preservation of the house and decorative arts. When talking about the bowing window in the great hall, she disclosed that the museum was hoping to fix that when the budget would allow. She showed the author hidden closets throughout the house that were part of the modernization of the Tudor house. In the library, she also allowed the author to tour the room beyond the ropes to see where there was a hidden staircase to a loft storage area. In this way she demonstrated her ability to appeal to her guest's interests and keep their attention.

2. Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.

The tour guide did not meet this standard. She was able to talk knowledgeably about the collections and the social history of both the Tudor and 1920's time periods. She did not, however, attempt to connect these topics to life today. This may have been because she was trying to meet the needs of her guest by focusing more on the collections and on the Williams' involvement in making the house into a museum. Tilden notes that interpretation begins when the facts have already been defined.¹³⁶ The tour

¹³⁶ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 814 of 3208.

guide for Agecroft Hall presented a lot of facts. However she did not attempt to go beyond the information.

3. 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 tour guide did not meet principle three. As stated in the assessment of principle two, the tour guide had more than sufficient knowledge of Agecroft Hall's collections, social history and architecture. However, she presented the information in a rambling collection of facts. At several points in the tour, she would backtrack to share an idea that she forgot. For example, in the living quarters on the first floor there were several original books on a sideboard. She moved on to talking about sources of entertainment and the chess set on the table before coming back to point out that one of the books on the sideboard was an original King James Bible. She did direct the conversation more toward the decorative arts and architecture. Though she could give the guest details about each piece in the collections, she did not convey it in terms of an ongoing narrative. She was very excited about the modern architectural secrets added to hide electrical switches, phones and additional storage spaces. This was the only time in the tour where she seemed to be able to put any of herself into the tour.

4. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

The tour guide met this principle. She was able to engage with her guest about a number of topics that were brought up during the tour. While she did not initiate the discourse, she was able to talk about the conflicted past of the transition between Catholicism and Protestantism in Tudor England. This topic came up while viewing Queen Elizabeth I pardon for the Catholic sympathies of the Langley family. She was

also able to discuss the preservation needs of the house when asked, including some deferred maintenance for the original glass panels. While the tour may have lacked any revelation, she was able to provoke thought and discussion from her guest.

5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.

The tour guide was successful in meeting this standard. The author left with a picture of daily life in the Tudor era as well as the social history surrounding the house and its owners during the 1920s. She was able to identify the needs of her guest and act accordingly, bringing up things that perhaps another audience would not have found as interesting, such as the hidden spaces for modern conveniences and the preservation needs of the house. Even though the tour was rambling and she jumped around from point to point, she was able to present more than just a typical tour, as defined in Chapter 3.

Virginia House:

The tour of Virginia House took place on January 31, 2013. In order to tour the house, an email to the director of the site was required. The email stated that the visiting guest was working toward a master's in historic preservation and would like to tour the house. The tour was scheduled for a week after the original contact. The tour guide was an employee of the Virginia Historical Society who works mostly at the Virginia House. The house tour began by entering through the west wing, or the replica of Sulgrave Manor. Inside, it was obvious that the room was a classroom.

Material Culture and collections:

The tour guide talked at length about many of the objects in the house. The west wing of the house was used as a guest wing. The bedroom is decorated in the Tudor

style. One unique piece was a portable desk that could be carried in a carriage. There is also a large Tudor style bed. A large stone relief, which would have originally been located on the exterior of the house, is a carving that indicates that Queen Elizabeth I stayed at the manor.

The rest of the house is decorated as the Weddell's left it.¹³⁷ The pieces vary widely in their style and age. In the dining room, a ten-fold eighteenth-century Mexican hunt scene screen is displayed on one wall. The tour guide pointed out that there are places where the images on the screen do not match because some of it must have been sliced off to accommodate the walls and sliding panels into the main entrance. The tour guide also pointed out the light fixtures that were made using original missals. She discussed the issues that modern historians would have with this, since it was original Renaissance vellum. The main entry way is designed to look like a medieval hall with linen-fold paneling.



Figure 6: Virginia House, staircase¹³⁸

¹³⁷ This is according to the tour guide.

¹³⁸ Photo by author

Social History:

The tour included aspects of the social history of the house in the 1920s. Not much of the Tudor history was discussed. The tour guide spoke about the Weddell's interest in furnishing the house with pieces that represented their travels around the world. They wanted the house to have a Tudor feel to it, so they focused on pieces that were, to them, medieval. When the house was rebuilt, the intention was for it to eventually become the headquarters for the Virginia Historic Society. Great pains were taken to make spaces that could later be adapted for research and archive rooms. In the basement of the house there are several archival rooms that are currently used for storing some documents for the society.

The guide touched on Virginia Weddell's reputation of being charitable. One of her biggest efforts was organizing relief efforts for the Spanish after the Civil War in the 1930s. In Richmond, Mrs. Weddell was involved in garden clubs and World War II benefits. She even made efforts to build affordable housing in Richmond for African Americans, something that was forward thinking for the time and was unsuccessful.

The couple had a close relationship with their maid, Violet Andrews, who accompanied them on a trip to Arizona in 1948. The Weddell's will listed Andrews as a benefactor.¹³⁹ According to the tour guide, had she not perished with them in the tragic train accident, she would have inherited enough money to live out the rest of her life quite comfortably.

Architecture, preservation and landscapes:

The architecture and landscapes were barely discussed on this tour, other than the moving of the building, which was touched on in the opening segments of the tour.

¹³⁹ This is according to the tour guide.

The staircase, which is original to the house, was cut in half with the downstairs portion being use in Virginia House and the second story in Agecroft Hall.

Virginia House and the Interpretation Standards:

The tour guide met three of Tilden's five principles

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or being described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile. Information, as such, is not interpretation.

The tour guide for Virginia House met this principle. She connected everything she talked about to the guest. She had personal conversations about everything from shared academic goals to the social history of the 1920s and how it differs from today's ideas of elegance. This tour was highly unconventional and the personalization made the tour an exciting experience. She was also able to talk about the operations of the museum, a layer of this particular tour that made it highly personalized to the guest.

2. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.

The tour guide met this standard. While she did not discuss how the social history of the house related to today's society, she was able to talk about the collections, the social history and the preservation of the house. She related these topics to the present. Since she is one of the stewards for the house, she was very knowledgeable about the preservation needs and given the author's interest in the sites preservation, she was able to connect almost everything to the modern problems faced by the Virginia Historic Society in terms of the house and its collection.

3. 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 tour guide did not meet this standard. The tour, while very personalized to the author's interests, was rambling and did not follow a specific narrative. It was easy to tell that this story was one she knew. However, for this tour, she would vacillate between personal conversations and the facts of the house. Because of this, the tour was highly disjointed and did not follow any particular order. She covered on all the major concepts of a thematic tour, but did not present the information in such a way that followed a timeline of events that would be easily recognized as the story of Virginia House.

4. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

The tour guide met this standard. She was able to discuss many different concepts with the author in terms of the preservation and interpretation of the house. She brought up and discussed at length what a tour would cover when leading groups of children ages seven to fourteen through Virginia House. Many topics came up during the tour. Due to the level of personalization, the tour guide was able to provoke discussion with the guest about topics from interpretation to the economic state of preservation in Virginia. For example, she stated that she did not believe that the house would ever open for daily tours again unless something drastically changed in the finances of the organization.

5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.

The tour guide did not meet this standard. The tour did not present a whole picture of the house. The author left with a clear impression of the preservation needs of

the house and the social history of the Weddells'. However, she did not create a clear timeline documenting the house from its origins in England to the present. This may not be necessary in understanding the preservation needs; it is important in grasping what the house's significance is and how it has been altered since in origins. She did not present a clear timeline of events from the relocation to the present, which would have presented a clear and whole picture of Virginia House, and allowed the guest to leave with more of an understanding of the broader concepts.

Wilton House:

The tour for this house took place on May 21, 2013. To start a tour, a guest rings the doorbell at the front door. The offices for the staff and volunteers are in the basement of the house. The tour begins outside on the grounds of the museum.

Material Culture and collections:

The interior of the house is decorated as it would have been during the 18th century. The formal parlor to the right is set up for after dinner entertainment with the ladies of the house. The office is to the left of the entrance. The only original Randolph piece of furniture, a Chippendale mahogany desk with an attached bookcase, is located in the office.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ This is according to the tour guide.



Figure 7: Wilton House, desk with attached bookcase¹⁴¹

The master bedchamber is also located on the first floor behind the office. This space was used by Mrs. Randolph to entertain and will sometimes be set up for tea service. Upstairs is a nursery, girl's and boy's bed chambers, and a guest room. At the time of the tour used for this research, the room was set to show to process of 'spring cleaning'.

Social History:

Wilton House's social history is set in the Revolutionary War. The house changes décor seasonally. For the summer months, they show linens covering the paintings and brass pieces, which would have helped to protect the items from the humidity of the Virginia summer. In the bedchambers, rosemary and lavender is tucked under the rugs and into the linen drawers. In the master bedchamber, a mannequin is set up to look

¹⁴¹ Photo from <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/desk-9>.

like a slave cleaning the room. These mechanisms help the visitor understand the way that a plantation would be run.¹⁴²

The tour guide explained that while many house museums may claim that General Washington stayed with them, Wilton House has actual proof of his visit in the form of a letter. While talking about Washington's visit, she discussed how a guest would be treated on a working plantation, mostly entertaining themselves until dinner time.

Architecture, preservation and landscapes:

The architecture was briefly discussed in terms of the style of the building. The tour guide talked about how the house was moved up the river by the Dames. She pointed out that the Georgian in style, identifiable by the symmetry and brick courses. The tour guide appeared excited to be talking with someone who may know more than she does about the architectural style. The guest indicated her experience with Colonial Williamsburg and familiarity with the Peyton Randolph house history¹⁴³, specifically the similarity between the paint colors used at the two homes.

Wilton House and the Interpretation Standards:

The tour guide met four of the five principles set by Tilden.

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or being described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile. Information, as such, is not interpretation.

¹⁴² Butcher-Youngmans, *Historic House Museums: A Practical Handbook for their Care, Preservation and Management*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993), 183-224

¹⁴³ During the author's time at Colonial Williamsburg, she helped to catalogue weather boards that were taken from the roof of the Peyton Randolph house. The house had always been thought to have been painted white. The paint evidence on the weather boards indicated that it had been painted a deep red during the Revolutionary time period represented at Williamsburg. This same color was used on the door and window frames at Wilton House.

The tour guide met this standard. She had previously been a teacher and was very interested in discussing the guest's future plans regarding education. Given what she knew, she introduced her lone guest to the museum director, a newly hired professional from Minnesota. Being aware of the author's interests, she attempted to talk about the preservation and restoration projects for the site. For example she showed several test panels, where they had systematically stripped the paint to the bottom layer. She explained that they had arranged for a specialist to perform further testing on the panels. The rooms would probably have been painted a light to medium grey instead of the current sky blue. The grey would have been reflective and added to the ability to light the house.

2. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.

The tour guide did not meet this standard. She did not attempt to connect her interpretation of the collections or social history to anything modern. She did talk about her personal experiences with being a volunteer at Wilton House, including trips made to Mount Vernon to learn from their staff. The tour covered the three general topics included in most thematic tours. She was very capable of talking about the collections and the social history of the time period of the house. However she did not present any connections to make the collections into anything other than objects or relate this information to daily life today.

3. 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 tour guide met this standard. This tour was well thought out and planned. The tour guide was able to stay focused on the story of the site. She did not lose her

train of thought throughout the tour, concentrating her narrative on how the collections fit into the social history of the site. Even when the author brought up other topics, she was able to continue with where she was in the tour, apparently without missing any major points of interest.

4. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

The tour guide met this standard. She seemed excited to learn about the paint colors used in other Randolph family buildings in the area. The guide discussed with the guest the idea of slavery at the plantation. This topic, according to the tour guide, can be a complicated one to discuss depending on the audience. This led to a conversation about how to present conflicted pasts at any site. This revealed that the guide was capable of having a thought provoking conversation with her guest.

5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.

The tour guide met this standard. The tour guide touched on the three major components of most tours: decorative arts, social history of the time period of the house, and the architecture. She stayed focused throughout the tour and when the author left this site, it was with a clear picture of the sites importance, including the role of slaves and women at the plantation.

Final Thoughts:

Though the three house museums represented here all presented tours that were above average in terms of meeting the standards set in Chapter 3, there are many others that need assistance. Tours can be good or bad depending on the interpretation plan and the presentation of the tour guide.¹⁴⁴ For example, when the author toured the

¹⁴⁴ Levy, *Great Tours*, xi

Davenport House in Savannah, Georgia, the tour guide knew the prescribed tour for the house, but little beyond that information to enhance the experience of the guest. Several questions asked by members of the tour group were answered with misinformation, such as the reason for using curtains in a southern home. In the author's experience, this is something that is unfortunately typical for house museums. Junior docents with the York County Historical Society in Pennsylvania were given guides books, but information was also provided, often incorrectly, by other docents. Docents would answer the questions of guests with what was believed to be facts. In truth, many times information conveyed to guests were local legends that held little truth.¹⁴⁵ While tradition plays a large part in the tour interpretation of a domestic setting, accounts that are told to guests should not be fables intended to entertain. Levy observed that bad tours can be a result of an overeager, enthusiastic tour guide, who delivers random facts without much organization.¹⁴⁶ Tour guides that incorporate this method of rambling storytelling in their tours can leave a bad impression on guests, especially if the guest is educated. In some cases, guests may know more than their guides. The tour guide at Locust Grove in Louisville Kentucky was not trained on several important objects in the house, specifically ones used in the process of making linen. When asked about them by the author, she was not able to answer nor did she know where to find the information.¹⁴⁷

Tilden's six principles, specifically the five discussed in this chapter, help to establish a standard for tour interpretation. A tour guide should ideally be able to meet

¹⁴⁵ This is based on the author's experience as a tour guide and as a guest.

¹⁴⁶ Levy, *Great Tours*, xi

¹⁴⁷ The objects in question were a flax breaker and combs, instruments used to clean the flax in order to spin it into linen.

all of these standards. In the case of the three houses used for this research, the tour guides were adequate in adapting their tours to the needs of their guest. They were able to discuss things outside of the tour's themes, including conflicted pasts and preservation aims of the house. However, two out of three of them failed to present a clear narrative for the house, presenting a disjointed and rambling tour. The problem presented by this is that if a tour guide gets too far off their script they may forget important pieces of information essential to the history of the house and the themes that the museum wishes to present. The author chose not to discuss the training provided to these tour guides, but instead to focus on the experience a tour guide could present to their guest without this knowledge. Good training is the key to correcting this problem. If an interpreter is given an outlined tour guide about the themes of the house, from its social history to its collections to the architecture, then it is much easier to stay focused on the narrative. The Wilton house tour guide provided an excellent example of this, staying focused on her story even when presented with questions outside the tour's themes. For the guides at Virginia House and Agecroft Hall, their desire to please their guests perhaps played a role in the disjointed tours presented. Overall, all three tour guides were extremely knowledgeable about their houses. It was a matter of presentation that separated them.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSIONS

Recommendations:

Standards for the interpretation of historic house museums may seem like a far-reaching goal. Each house museum has a different mission, history and theme that set it apart from other house museums. Using the standards for interpretation set by the NPS using experts like Tilden, Beck and Cable and the thematic tours highlighted by Levy and Butcher-Youngmans, an assessment can be made of the three tours used for this research. Using five of the six standards set forth by Tilden, the author can make the following general recommendations for each house.

1. Recommendations for Agecroft Hall

The tour guide for this house met three out of the five interpretation standards set forth by Tilden. The tour was adapted to meet the needs of the guest. The tour was thought provoking. The tour guide was also able to present a whole picture of the site and its importance.

The tour guide here did adapt her tour for her guest, which shows that she has the ability to relate to her guest, which is important. Tilden's principle number two states that information is not interpretation. A guide should be able to reveal how the facts fit into daily life. The site is not just a place where something happened; it is incorporated into a much broader context and shows pertinent information in regards to life today. By not

connecting the items and history of the house to the present, the guest is left wondering how the site is relevant.

In terms of interpretation, tour guides should be able to stay focused on their narrative in order to present all the pertinent information for the site. This includes presenting the social history and how that social history connects to the collections. The tour guide told the author that she was not going to follow her normal tour. Whether the tour guide's inability to stay focused on the narrative for the house was because of her attempts to connect with her guests interests is not clear. However, sticking to her normal tour may have aided her considerably in covering all the information needed to present a story that was cohesive throughout the entire tour. While ultimately she was successful in painting a whole picture of the site and its importance, she did not do so in a focused manner. The author felt that the tour was a collection of thoughts instead of story. The training for the tour guides was not addressed in this paper; however, there is certainly a script that is supposed to be used at this museum. If the tour guide had followed the script, she would have presented a more thorough account of the houses social history, collections and architecture. With that being said, the author enjoyed the tour and would return to the site to learn more.

2. Recommendations for Virginia House

The tour guide met three out five of the standards discussed. She adapted her tour to the needs of her guest, revealed more than just information about the house, and provoked further discussion from her guest.

Tilden states that interpretation is an art. A skilled interpreter will know where they are going when they start the tour and will not get carried away. The tour lacked

direction. When compared to the standards, it was much too personal. Since this house is not open to the public for regular tours, it is hard to offer a recommendation on how to correct this. Taking the time to schedule a tour indicates, in the opinion of the author that the guest has a great interest in the museum, whether because of its individual history or the cultural experience of visiting. Because of this, the ability to personalize the tour is important. However, this does not mean that the tour should not follow a specific set of guidelines to ensure the inclusion of the social history, the collections and the architecture.

The tour guide was very knowledgeable about Virginia House. She was however unfocused in her presentation. This led to a disjointed tour that did not clearly demonstrate the history of the site in relation to the collections and to today. The tour guide was clearly interested in her guest's motivations for visiting the site. Since she is one of the site's caretakers, she was able to discuss topics with the author that a regular tour guide, such as a volunteer or paid interpreter, would probably not be able to.

In this instance, the author recommends that the tour guide keep in mind the purpose for the guest's visit. While interacting on a personal level is important for making the visitor's experience a memorable one, making sure that they leave with a whole picture of the museum helps to create a lasting impression.

3. Recommendations for Wilton House

The tour guide met four out of five of Tilden's principles. The tour of Wilton House was exemplary because it not only connected to the author's interests, but also presented a whole story of the house, staying focused on the themes of the tour.

Tilden states in principle two that an interpreter will be able to reveal more than just the facts. A tour guide will be able to delve into more than just the information and connect the facts to the present. The tour guide was able to talk about the collections and the social history separately. She did not connect these things to each other. The author felt that this did not reveal more than just the facts. If she had been able to connect the collections to the social commentary, it would have been a more detailed and focused tour, revealing how the house and its contents connect to modern life.

In the author's opinion, this tour was an example of what a focused your guide is capable of presenting. However, the tour would have been made better by simply connecting some of the past experiences to modern ones. The house is set up to show how life would be during different seasons and demonstrates the way in which the slaves and family would adjust to the changing in temperatures and climates. For the spring and summer, the museum shows linen over the paintings to illustrate how they would try to prevent the oils from melting off. They put fresh herbs, like lavender, in the drawers and under rugs to show how the slaves would freshen up spaces, essentially doing a spring cleaning. The tour guide should use these demonstrative changes in the house museum to connect to how Americans do things today. Explain how the fresh herbs acted like candles or fragrance oils to make the space smell good. Perhaps explain the need to protect the paintings with linen in terms of why that is no longer needed. In this way, the guest can understand the lives of the people who lived there. They can also connect their daily routines to that of the past and ask the question, "what would I do if presented with the same circumstances?"

Future Research Potential:

The research presented in this thesis is very general, analyzing the tours from the perspective of a guest with no assessment of the tour guides training. There are several future research options related to tour interpretation and the standards set by the experts in the field.

1. Using the standards set for good interpretation and the thematic tour approach, a future researcher could follow the interpretation training programs at the houses used in the study.

Since the author intended to look at these tours from a guest's perspective, future research could investigate the full training program at the house museums. Analyzing how the tour guides are able to implement the scripted tour as well as adapt to their audience would be an interesting layer to this study. The researcher would be able to test the interpreters against the training they receive from the museums. In addition, other interpretive programs could be analyzed, such as the classes and tours for children or special interest groups. This would include Tilden's sixth principle that children's interpretative programs should be separate from what is presented to an adult.

2. Every few years the interpretation plan should be thoroughly reviewed and updated. Tour guides should be trained and retrained to ensure they are kept up to date on the interpretation needs and focus of the museum.

Interpretation is a never ending evolution for every museum. It must change with current events and thoughts toward the topics being presented. This way the tour is updated with the most recent research. In order to attract an ever changing audience,

the tour needs to be related to the present. The tours should be added to and adjusted, periodically to reflect research that includes engendered history such as women's and ethnic roles at the site. Today, the role of slavery should not be feared but instead embraced as a conflicted past that needs to be addressed. Many sites have been lauded for their inclusion of this history such as Mount Vernon, Colonial Williamsburg and Monticello, all very popular sites. Having a self-monitoring system in place for the interpretation is a key component to making sure this happens.

It is also important to continually train and work with the interpreters. As with any customer service related industry, the tour guides must be personable and have the ability to handle any situation they encounter. Keeping the guides up to date on new research and events will help to keep the museum relevant. It will also facilitate return customers and good reviews.

A future researcher may want to analyze how an interpretation plan can be updated and implemented by studying the evolution of an interpretation program, perhaps at one of the larger institutions such as Mount Vernon. They could see how it changed to benefit the guest and what the successes and failures were in regards to past programs.

3. A survey should be made of historic house museums to determine how many exist and to assist museums with management planning.

It is not known exactly how many historic house museums exist on a statewide level, let alone a national level. There is no way of knowing what the issues are, on average, for historic house museums in the United States. Forming a system to monitor these museums would be a difficult, but necessary undertaking. State level surveys might be

the first place to start. The monitoring organization could help sites to implement better site management, including interpretation, funding and marketing.

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) should be involved in setting it up. From there a decision should be made about who will administer such a survey and if it needs to be broken down into smaller more local levels first. Most communities have a historical society or non-profit preservation organization that could be involved with managing a study like this. Once this is established, a list of questions could be compiled. This should include information about a number of things, including funding, attendance, and hours of operation. It would be better to go beyond the basics and include questions about marketing and interpretation strategies to gain a better view of what is working for the house museums and what is not.

Conclusions:

As can be seen through the three examples, a good tour is based on the tour theme and the ability of the tour guide to meet the standards set by Tilden. Tour guides should be able to relate to their guests. Being personable with the visitor ensures that the guest remains interested in the tour and in the site. Tour guides should be able to reveal more than just information. They should make the visitor ask what they would do in a similar situation, ultimately connecting the site to the present. Tour guides should be able to tell a story. This entails keeping focused on the themes of the tour. Tour guides should provoke thought through their tours, being able to discuss things that bring to light further questions about the site. A tour guide should be able to present a whole story not just part of one. They should be able to focus their narrative to include

an entire picture, from past to present, of the site so that the guest leaves with a complete understanding.

Using nothing other than the information that could be obtained by a tourist, it is clear that the three museums featured here had good interpreters. They were able to adapt to their guests interests and provoke further conversation from their guest in terms of social history and preservation needs. While this may have led to some disorganized tours that did not follow a complete narrative, it did demonstrate the tour guides interest in keeping their visitor satisfied. All three tours were informative, allowing the author to leave with a clear, if not complete, picture of each house. As can be seen through the three examples, a good tour is based on the tour theme and the ability of the tour guide to meet the standards set by Tilden.

House museums are set apart in the museum world. However, they can use these interpretation standards to make sure their tours engage the public and leave them understanding the relevance and importance of the museum. A house museum should use their interpretation as a means for connecting the history of the museum to the present, helping their guests to understand the importance of the site on many levels, not just as a pretty place to visit. By doing this, the museum can associate with the community and demonstrate their value in terms of connecting the past to the present.

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