

Rebuilding the Past:
Understanding the Role of Objects in Creating
Authentic Experiences for Visitors to Living History Museums

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Abstract

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Over the past 30 years, living history museums have seen declining visitation and sites are continuously challenged to deliver compelling historic-based experiences in modern times. Living history museums are uniquely positioned in that they transport visitors into the past by creating what is often called 'authentic experiences', using tools such as interpreters, performance, and objects. Objects, including historic structures, antiques, and reproductions, are used in many ways to engage visitors, such as in displays and hands-on activities. The goal of this research was to understand the role of objects in creating authentic experiences for visitors to living history museums. This qualitative case study used semi-structured interviews with museum professionals involved in visitor experience design, at Greenfield Village at The Henry Ford in Dearborn, MI, Colonial Williamsburg in Williamsburg, VA, and Conner Prairie in Fishers, IN. Results show that the visitor experience at living history museums is focused on immersing visitors in human stories. Museum professionals believe that creating an authentic experience is a critical part of the larger visitor experience. Authenticity manifests itself differently depending on whether the stories being told, building connections between the past and present, or the visitors' interests are more important to the museum. Museum professionals did agree that objects hold an important place in the authentic visitor experience, as tools to help immerse visitors in stories and build connections between the past and their own lives. These findings can be used to help inform living history museums of the variety of ways to interpreting their sites and engaging visitors in history.

Key Words: living history museums, authentic, authenticity, storytelling, stories, objects, visitor experience, exhibit design, museum, immersive, The Henry Ford, Greenfield Village, Colonial Williamsburg, Conner Prairie

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Chapter One: Introduction

As you walk into Greenfield Village, it feels as if you have stepped back in time. You are greeted a pleasant “good-morning!” by people dressed in 19th century clothing, and wonder exactly where you have landed. You walk to the town square and see other guests playing a game with hoops that is not familiar at all. You walk past a horse-drawn carriage, up to an old 18th century farm house where a guide welcomes you in and talks about the huge beams towering above your head and what they are cooking for lunch, before inviting you to candle-dipping in the yard. This place you have stepped into is a living history museum. In 2015, more than 1.7 million people visited The Henry Ford and Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan (Ford, 2016). Experience-based sites, have been popular attractions in the United States for many years, with one of the most popular, Walt Disney World, welcoming 20 million people in 2015 (Reikofski, 2016). Living history museums are an example of experience-based sites in the United States that uses immersive designs to engage visitors’ senses during their visits. Like theme parks, living history museums strive to create unique and engaging experiences. Unlike theme parks, living history museums are unique because they “attempt to simulate life in another time” (Anderson 1992: 456).

Despite the popularity of many experience-based sites, living history museums in particular are faced with declining visitation. As noted by the Vice Mayor of the City of Williamsburg in correspondence with local newspaper The Flat Hat,

“Historic Tourism isn’t as popular as it once was...There has also been a significant increase in competition for tourists...The era of the two-week car vacation is over, and we’re vying for guests’ scarce time in a more competitive recreational marketplace,” Sardone said.” (Zhan, 2017)

This is detrimental to the continued preservation and management of these sites. In order to continue to bring visitors to their sites, living history museums may need to leverage their one-of-a-kind, authentic experiences. They are uniquely situated to engage people in history, culture, and heritage because they have large historic collections, including structures, from the past that recreate historical environments.

For living history museums, authenticity refers to an attempt to simulate a historic period as closely as possible, making the visitor feel immersed in that time period being represented. Visitors want to see or experience the “real” thing when they visit a living history museum; they want the representation of the past to be as close as possible to the actual past (Wilkening and Donnis 2008). They don’t know what a perfectly authentic recreation actually is, but use historical evidence, such as archaeology or primary sources of writing, to build it as close as they can. The idea of authenticity permeates how everything is designed and situated at the site, including objects, the interpretation, demonstrations, and even food and souvenirs in their gift shops. (Interpretation Project, 2009; Wilkening and Donnis, 2008). In order to uphold visitors’ expectations for an authentic experience and combat decreases in visitation, it is important for living history museums to have a deep understanding of how authentic experiences are designed at their site, what that means in relationship to visitor expectations, and the important tools that go into creating that experience for the visitor. Objects — the collections, reproductions, and other physical things that go into helping to build the authentic experience — are one of those important tools. Objects play a key role for experiencing, understanding, and teaching an authentic history (Tisdale, 2016). Living history museums of all sizes and types, such as Colonial Williamsburg, Plimoth Plantation, or a small community farm museum, use objects to help tell stories or teach about the past and people that occupied their site.

Researching how objects contribute to an authentic visitor experience at each site is an important step to building an understanding of visitor experiences at living history museums and what guides decision making within institutions. While the ideas of objects and building experiences for museum visitors have been well documented and studied broadly, the relationship between these two in designing authentic experiences at living history museums is not well researched. The purpose of this study is to understand the role of objects in creating authentic experiences at living history museums. Specifically, what characteristics or qualities of objects do staff focus on when using them to create the visitor experiences, how do objects fit into the design of the visitor experience at living history museums and contribute to an authentic experience, what “authentic experience” means for staff creating the experience for visitors to living history museums, and how the staff understanding of visitor experiences fit into what staff perceive their visitors expect from their experience? By understanding the role of objects as a part of developing authentic experiences for visitors, living history museum professionals will be able to do more in the future.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction to Literature

Living history is “an attempt to simulate life in another time...usually the past” (Anderson, 1992, p. 456). There are three types of reasons given by Anderson (1992) for why people attempt to recreate the past, including “to interpret material culture more effectively, usually as a living museum, to test an archaeological thesis or generate an idea for historical ethnographies, and to participate in an enjoyable recreational activity that is also a learning experience” (p.456-457). Living history museums have immersive environments built around the idea of creating historical experiences for visitors using material culture. “Living history museums, with their daily displays of the intersection of human agency and historical circumstances, provide a clear picture of a unique place and culture in a specific time” (Allison, 2002, p. 8). These educational and entertaining experiences are constructed using a variety of different tools such as objects in a historic house and interpreters that interact with visitors, by different living history museums to varying degrees depending on the size and resources available to the institution.

While living history museums strive to provide an educational experience that is historically accurate by simulating life in another time, authenticity is also an important factor for visitors when they are thinking about visiting a living history museum. Visitors are drawn to living history museums for these unique historical experiences that include performances, hands-on learning, environmental and physical immersion, connection to their own heritage, and the ability to engage multiple senses.

Objects are an important part of simulating the past at these sites and building these authentic historical experiences. They are the foundation of living history museums. Exploring

the complex history and relationship between authenticity, objects, and living history museums illustrates how these ideas are ingrained in museum practice, but the specific role of objects in creating the visitor experience is not well understood at living history museums today. Therefore, this research study focuses on understanding how authentic visitor experiences are created and the role of objects in creating that experience. It aims to give a greater understanding of how visitor experiences are designed, and therefore what living history museums can do for their visitors. There are key concepts that have been researched that give important context to this study. Firstly, living history museums are unique institutions that strive to build authentic historical experiences for visitors to educate, entertain, and engage visitors in the past and present. Secondly, living history museums are able to achieve this through exhibit design, interpretation, performance, and objects. Thirdly, objects play an essential part in creating authentic experiences that provide visitors with a tangible sense of the past.

Living History Museums - What are They?

Living history museums can be traced back to 1891 with the opening of Skansen in Stockholm, Sweden (“Living History Resources”, 2017). This site was related to European folklorists’ attempts to preserve history of regional culture and daily life nearly forgotten due to the industrial revolution (Anderson, 1992; Shafernich, 45). Early living history museums in the United States were also the result of an attempt to preserve a slowly disappearing farming and agricultural lifestyle, being replaced by the industrial revolution. For example, Greenfield Village at The Henry Ford was built to preserve the story of American history and daily life. While sites like Colonial Williamsburg, Greenfield Village at The Henry Ford, and Plimoth Plantation are what comes to mind when thinking about living history museums, the term also

includes the multitude of small working farm museums and working house museums, military forts, ships, and some historic homes that are prevalent in smaller communities across the United States. While similar to their European counterparts, the difference for living history museums in North America was centered on the idea to present the ‘world of ordinary people’ (Anderson, 1992, p. 458-459). Living history museums in the United States saw a boom in 1960s and 1970s, thought to be due to the decline in family farms and the feeling of needing to preserve traditions of the past (Allison, 2016, p. 13).

While living history museums each have a unique story of how they came to be, they are similar in their design with variations in size and scale. Colonial Williamsburg was developed as a historic restoration of existing structures funded by John D. Rockefeller, in order to preserve the story and structures associated with the American Revolution; Greenfield Village at The Henry Ford as “a group of buildings collected by Henry Ford in 1926 according to his whims” in order to save the story of the everyday person; or Old Sturbridge Village whose “relocated historic buildings served as backdrops for the large collection of objects accumulated by two brothers” (Stover, 1989, p.14). These large living history museums are just three examples the diverse development of living history sites, but use similar strategies to engage visitors with the past including performance, interpretation, hands-on engagement, immersion, storytelling, and objects. There are numerous reasons as to why these sites put in such immense effort into designing these experiences, with the driving force being their mission for educating about the past in a fun, immersive historical environment from when they were first founded.

Living History - The Key to Recreating the Past

Creating an authentic experience and specifically having authentic objects have been very important for living history museums but they are not unique to living history museums.

Authentic objects have always been considered extremely valuable for museums since their inception, and authenticity was the most important characteristic of collections for European travelers when they built their cabinets of curiosity in the 16th century. However, the idea of authenticity has changed over time. Authenticity is neither a static concept nor a fact.

Individuals, cultures, and societies categorize things as authentic versus inauthentic, and these categories are built on tangible and intangible aspects of objects, such as their designs or history of use. In addition, different museums can define the authenticity of the same object differently. For example, Native American tourist art was considered authentic by tourists for many years because of its designs and was made by a Native person, while it was inauthentic for scholars as it had not been used by Native peoples in ceremonies or other contexts (Phillips and Steiner, 1999). For similar reasons, while an art museum may consider an art piece “authentic” in their museum, it can be inauthentic in the anthropology museum (Phillips and Steiner, 1999). As part of its broad mission to educate and illuminate, it has traditionally been important for museums to present the real thing, or an authentic piece of a culture or the natural world, and shown to be important for museum visitors as well (Pekarik et al., 1999). For many years, the real object was the best representation, instead of a type of reproduction.

The idea of authenticity has only recently been applied to building an authentic experience for visitors, which often includes authentic objects. Museums have begun to explore how to use objects to create what they feel is an authentic encounter with the object or time period. The Museum of Liverpool restored an original stage used by the Quarrymen Band, where

member John Lennon met Paul McCartney. Instead of keeping the stage looking in its present condition, the museum decided to restore it to how it looked at when the two men met (Leonard, 2013). The Museum staff decided to present this object as authentic of what the stage once was in order to let visitors feel as if they are at the original concert (Leonard, 2013). In contrast, the American Museum of Natural History attempted to make an authentic, or life-like, whale specimen by casting a life-size whale specimen in their exhibits for the public to see (Rossi, 2010). While the object itself was not an authentic whale taxidermy, the model was meant to be as close to the real thing as you could get for visitors to see and experience what a real whale was like. While each museum chose different ways to present authenticity of the objects (Leonard, 2013; Rossi, 2010), they both wanted their visitors to have an authentic experience, even if that was different at each museum. Authenticity has been an important element for museums, including living history museums, for many years. Living history museums have always tried to create an entirely experience authentic.

How Living History Museums Design Historical Experiences

While there are many approaches to achieving the educational and experiential goals of living history museums (e.g. first and third person costumed and non-costumed interpreters, performance, theater, and objects), a significant effort is dedicated to designing exhibits that offer an authentic and physically immersive look and feel. Physical exhibit design techniques and physical design features are critical tools for creating a specific visitor experiences at museums and helping visitors feel immersed, comfortable and engaged in content (Carliner, 2001). There are key guiding concepts used in exhibits that help determine how visitors move and experience a space: immersion, themes, layering, and skimmability (Carliner, 2001). Design

features such as interactive exhibits, multisensory stimulation, lighting, and dynamic display, are some of the main features of exhibit design that guide the manipulation of the key concepts (Bitgood, 1990; Harvey et al., 1998). Exhibit designers use these concepts as guidelines for physical exhibit development, with the intention that the exhibit does not overwhelm visitors and creates an overall positive experience (Carliner, 2001). Exhibit design affects the visitor's experience in subtle yet meaningful ways, both physically and psychologically. Visitors experiencing flow (feeling a sense of continuity) are more immersed than those that are not (Harvey et al., 1998, p.620). Even when small design features are changed in an exhibit, it can affect visitor attention during their visit to that exhibit (Harvey et al., 1998). In addition,

Since telling a story and immersing visitors in the past is an important part of living history museums, exhibit designers should pay close attention to the design of spaces to tell a particular story. Storytelling is also prevalent in another type of immersive exhibit — blockbusters. Blockbusters are one type of exhibit that uses a well-known story or history and designs it in an immersive experience that is of broad general interest (Carliner, 2001), such as *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition* or *The Discovery of King Tut* exhibition. These large exhibits try to recreate environments, similar to living history museums, and tell stories that many people know and have artifacts that are unique and historically important. Using recreated pieces from the Titanic, the narrative is expressed chronologically. As a visitor is guided through the exhibit from one room to the next, they are told a story of the different people on the ship and what they experienced during the tragic night the ship sank.

Making visitors feel immersed and presenting a story is a critical component for living history museums, just like large blockbuster exhibits. Living history museums have historically paid very close attention to an authentic historical visitor experience that immerses visitors in the

past. Unfortunately, this type of immersion can sometimes be mistaken for a theme park like experience instead of an educational one, due to tools like theater and performance used to talk about history in a different way. Colonial Williamsburg has struggled with balancing the immersive exhibit design and entertainment with education, because even educated middle class visitors have mistaken the institution for a theme park, “a business that sells phony experiences to make a profit” instead of “an altruistic cultural institution whose lofty mission is public education and historic preservation” (Handler & Gable, 1997). They are committed to creating a historical experience that connects each visitor to the past, which can be difficult to balance when trying to entertain guests as well. Staff are often describing what their museum as what it is not, and not what it is (Allison, 2016, p. 30). Living history museums continue to work to balance the unique tools of interpretation, performance, and objects to teach visitors about the past and people, while entertaining them and building connections to the past.

Interpretation and Performance in Living History Museums

Interpretation and performance are important tools for making visitors feel they are having an authentic experience at living history museums. There are three major types of interpretation of the environment (the objects, buildings, and activities) in living history museums: labels, first-person interpretation, and third-person interpretation. These three components often work together to help the visitor learn more about what they are looking at, understand the context they are in, and immerse them in a historical simulation, ultimately working toward giving them an authentic experience. First-person interpretation is “the act of portraying a person from the past (real or composite)...The standard form is one in which the interpreters refer to the past in the present tense; employ a combination of techniques including

storytelling, demonstration, question and answer, and discussion; encourage verbal interaction from the audience; and avoid breaking character” (Roth, 1998b, p.1). First-person interpretation can often be regarded as a performance since interpreters never break character while interacting with visitors as if they are in the past. First-person interpretation offers a quicker but deep way for visitors to engage with the past. “By assuming a historic persona, the role-player humanizes complex information while performing tasks, activities, or scenes that are within context of everyday life” (Roth, 1998a, p. 13). Interpreters, specifically first-person, can enact “narratives that build toward deeper understanding and empathy towards those that lived in the past and, hopefully, create pathways to solutions to current societal challenges” (Allison, 2016, p.24). In contrast, third-person interpretation is “informative, often interactive talks and demonstrations by interpreters who may be dressed in period attire but do not assume character roles” (Roth, 1998b, p.3). Third-person interpretation focuses more on direct education and giving visitors the opportunity to ask questions about the time period, an object, or a story in the context of the larger picture of history. Therefore, the potential impact and use of interpretation at living history museums makes it an important and unique tool at these sites to connect to visitors.

Each method of interpretation offers unique ways to engage a multitude of different visitors. Sometimes living history museums also use mixed interpretive medium to help enhance the experience. Colonial Williamsburg, for example, uses three types of interpreters to engage visitors: costumed historical interpreters who act as guides, costumed interpreters for demonstrations, and first-person interpreters (Stover, 1989). Mixed interpretive medium is “interpretation that combines more than one method of interpretation. For example, a third-person guide who acts as a mediator between visitors and first-person interpreters, or a first-person program that closes with a third-person question and answer session” (Roth, 1998b, p.2).

Accordingly, living history museums have the unique ability to create an authentic experience through the multitude of levels of interpretation. Performances are often a little bit different from regular interpretation as they are more “spontaneous or built around scenarios, themes, or events” (Roth, 1998a, p. 13). Each type of interaction with guests provides useful ways to interact. Performance can take form in the interactive programming at living history museums, in which visitors are invited in some capacity to be a part of a reenactment, a theatrical performance, or even a deeper historical experience. For example, at Conner Prairie “Live In” programs offer visitors the chance to immerse themselves in the early 19th century lifestyle (Allison, 2016, p. 6). These types of programs can be incredible immersive and give visitors’ agency in understanding and being a part of the story.

In addition, living history museums further enhance the overall performance and interpretation by using objects. Programming at living history museums has given visitors “a closer bond with people of the past and a more complete understanding of history” (Stover, 1989, p.16). Using objects in demonstrations and performance attempt to give them new meaning and provide a more authentic experience. “A visitor to Plimoth Plantation today...would see the costumed interpreters living with the objects, working with them, and using them to create a believe ‘slice of life’ of 1627 in the Plymouth Colony” (Magelssen, 2004, p. 52). The ability to not only have objects on display but also use them to create an immersive experience through first and third person interpreters gives museums new ways to recreate history. “By backing up the performance of the past with a wealth of document evidence [which includes period artifacts] museums make the history they portray ‘more real’” (Magelssen, 2004, p. 66). This performance could also include reenactments of a specific historical event to help tell a

story, or a more general day to day scenario that one may witness during that time period, in the context of a building.

Using Objects in Living History Museums - Immersion and Learning

Objects have played a central part of living history museums and helping these sites create an authentic experience for their visitors, providing a way to engage visitors in learning about the past, props in performance and interpretation, and setting the environment. Objects are central to the visitor experience, but what exactly is an object? Museums have collected objects of many different types and for many different reasons. Elaine Gurian notes how, for a long time, museum professionals described museum objects as the “real” thing, which “often meant ‘one of a kind,’ but it also meant ‘an example of’” (Gurian, 1999). They were tangible things that museums collected and became art of the museum collections. Objects were “unique” and “examples of” something (Gurian, 1999, p.182). Gurian (1999) argues that more recently “the definition of ‘objectness’ will remain broad and allow for every possible method of storymaking” (p.182). Objects in museums can include many things such as replicas that are educational materials, maps to help get around the museum, or for living history museums objects that are produced on site in working trade shops, used in staging a historic house, or even in the gift store.

Objects have been a major focus of museums for centuries. Objects tell stories and contain information about human history and the natural world. Collecting objects for display was the basis for the modern museum beginning in the 16th century. Europeans started collecting objects and displaying them in rooms in their houses. These spaces were called “cabinets of curiosity”. Their collections consisted of objects from all over the world as colonial explorers

traveled to North and South America, Africa, and Asia. Owning “real” or “authentic” objects were important to scholars and travelers as they represented their wealth and prestige. This collection of objects slowly transformed into museums in Europe and the United States, such as the British Museum, after these items were donated to these institutions to preserve them for the future. Museums from the 18th to mid-20th century stood as beacons of knowledge and protectors of these objects of the natural and cultural world. As Elaine Gurian (1999) described, “[museums’] security...lay in owning objects... [Museum professionals] were like priests and the museums [their] reliquaries” (p.166). While objects in museums today are seeing a transformation, they remain an important part.

When referring to objects in this study, objects were involved in simulating the historical visitor experience at a living history museum. This includes objects that are a part of accessioned material in the collection, but also objects used for educational purposes such as reproductions, or as the costumes that interpreters are wearing at the site. Any physical thing used as an element of design in the authentic visitor experience at the living history museum in this instance is an “object”.¹ Objects are prevalent in the visitor experience of living history museums. In sites like living history museums, “any activity involving the making, using, or reusing of objects are typical ways visitors learn about artifacts by seeing something done to or with them... which can prompt one to muse about the why and wherefore of human creativity (Schlereth, 1992, p. 105). Using objects to actively engage visitors allows living history museums to provide new opportunities with the visitor experience that build on visitor knowledge and encourage them to think beyond the object. Similarly in many museums, “objects serve as focal points for bringing

¹ This does not include visitor guides, maps, interpretive labels for objects or sites, or benches that are part of the visitor experience in that they things that contribute to visitor navigation, convenience, and comfort, but are not meant to simulate a past historical, authentic, experience that is the focus of this study.

ideas, thoughts, and meaning together in the same place; they aid in people's ability to create meaning in the world" (Wood and Latham, 2014, p.30). Wood and Latham argue that "...it may be that what visitors need is not necessarily more of a museum's interpretation of an object, but a *transformation* of the object into a new way of knowing it" (p.31). Living history museums are uniquely situated to bring to life objects and use them to create new meaning for visitors through immersive experiences.

Objects in Museums: Current Debate and Role

Discussing the role of objects in living history museum comes at a time in museums where the role of objects is highly debated. Historically, objects have been an important part of all different types of museums but their roles as examples of facts and beacons of knowledge may be changing. Steven Conn (2010) most notably has been challenging the importance of objects in museums since the late 20th century. As Conn (2010) describes, "objects have lost pride of place in many museums because they aren't necessary to fulfill some of the functions we now expect museums to perform" (p.22). Museums have new technologies and reproductions to illustrate an idea, such as how dinosaurs walked or how an artist makes a sculpture. Or arguably, the question is not if we need objects or not, but is actually based on context of using objects (Conn, 2010). "While all museums at the turn of the twentieth century conceived of themselves as places to display objects, over the course of that century it became clear not only that different kinds of museums require different kinds of objects but also that they make role of objects in very different ways" (Conn, 2010, p.23). Perhaps then, "the foundational definition of museums will, in the long run... arise not from objects, but from 'place' and 'storytelling in tangible

sensory form’... (Gurian, 1999, p. 181). Objects roles may be in a sense less direct in educational purpose, and more so on the storytelling that museums strive towards.

With a focus on education and the visitor experience, objects take on a new and different purpose in museums. As Wood and Latham (2014) argue, “Objects are the *basis of the visitor experience*” (p. 13). Objects are becoming an important part of the visitor experience in many museums, and there are new ideas of how objects can be useful in museum design. Instead of focusing on how objects themselves can instill knowledge in all the museum visitors, objects become a tool for “how the visitor will experience the messages and content of the exhibitions” (Wood and Latham, 2014, p. 15). Objects have gained new value as “objects enable reflection, and speculation” for visitors to exhibits and museum experiences (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p.108). Objects encourage visitors to think critically about information, ideas, and create their own meaning. Objects often bring out memories, can be involved in identity creation for visitors, and share personal information and stories (Hooper and Greenhill, 2000; Silverman, 1995). Objects can be used in powerful new ways to connect visitors’ personal experiences and meaning to objects. Museums and living history museums have the opportunity to use objects to provide unique experiences for their visitors.

Objects can tell stories and make visitors think about their own stories. “The history and the authenticity of objects can draw out narratives within the individuals and create an atmosphere where it is only natural to share stories and narratives” (Morrissey, 2002, p. 294). Living history museums’ uniqueness of objects in context provides a perfect space to which understand the role of objects and the impact as potential tools for learning and understanding if providing space to talk with others is important for designers. “Encounters with objects provide an opportunity for dialogue, inquiry, and conversation through which individuals find deeper

connection...to each other as conversations twist around the [objects], the content, and the thoughts and experiences of each individual” (Morrissey, 2002, p. 285). It is the ability of objects to facilitate interactions between people that makes objects in museums so important to learning (Morrissey, 2002). This could take form in the interaction of visitors or visitors and interpreters at living history museums. What is powerful about objects is that they have a language or story that is more powerful than the object itself, prompting individual reflection about a time period, story, or people (Morrissey, 2002). Therefore, within living history museums where the story of a time period or people is prominent, objects are a potential method of providing connection to the past.

Using objects to create an entirely new and exciting visitor experience also has to include the visitors. Object-centered learning has become an important tool for museums even as the debate of the role of objects continues. While research that focuses on object-centered learning looks at children and their experiences in museums, it offers valuable insight into how objects can and are used to help visitors learn in museums, and how objects are one tool used by living history museums to help people learn about the past, in addition to feeling immersed in it. Museums have begun to recognize that people build, or construct their own knowledge (Rowe, 2002). The idea of constructivism, becomes an important tool for museums when thinking about how objects might mediate the interaction between visitors, their experience, and what they learn.

Visitors all carry their own experiences and meaning when they come to museums, which influences how they experience the museum and its objects (Wood and Latham, 2014, p. 11). Therefore, objects can also serve as new tools for understanding and building of what they already know and do not know. “In [new] instances, museums are encouraging visitors to acquire

object knowledge on their own” or even showing visitors how to think about objects (Schlereth, 1992, p. 105). Objects become tools in the pursuit of new knowledge or thinking, not to just instill facts on the visitor. The importance of having an authentic object that was so important for many years in museums may now be changing as museums rethink what they do with their collections and what type of experience they are trying to provide.

A recent trend in museum education is to “invite visitors into the meaning-making experience, drawing on what they know and the alternative possible meanings museum objects afford and multiple ways of interacting with and around objects” (Rowe, 2002, p.33). The context of objects in a historic space at living history museum provides a different space with which to examine how these ideas of constructing knowledge are addressed by staff. As Allison (2016) notes for living history museums though, “museums like Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation that have an overtly national or political perspective may find it more difficult to pull away from their overarching narratives to break history into easily relatable, experiential nuggets that can spark visitor’s curiosities” (p.9). Thus, allowing visitors to construct their own knowledge with objects can be difficult, with larger historical narratives that don’t relate as well to visitors lives and stories.

Objects remain a central part of all living history museums as they provide unique ways to engage with history and tell stories. The idea of employing multiple senses in the space provides visitors with a connection to the past and heritage (Naumova, 2015). Even within performance, objects are used as a means to create an immersive authentic experience, as mentioned when discussing performance and theater in museums above. Using objects in demonstrations and performance attempt to give them new meaning and provide a more authentic experience. The ability to not only have objects on display but also use them to create

an immersive experience through first and third person interpreters gives museums new ways to recreate history. Objects in these many ways are one tool to creating the authentic experiences for visitors. Understanding the role of objects in the overall authentic design, and the characteristics and qualities that are important, is thus important to understanding the experience living history museums strive for.

Final Thought: What do Visitors Expect?

Visitors have come to expect an authentic historical experience from living history museums. This has influenced the goals for these sites and the ways in which they design the experiences. During a study of visitors to living history museums, Wilkening and Donniss (2008) found that visitors had certain expectations for an authentic experience, related to historical accuracy, the overall experience, and the individual objects in the space (Wilkening and Donniss, 2008). For example, understanding if something is “real” for a visitor is very important for performances in living history museums, and immersing visitors in the past, even it is not actually real (Hughes, 2011). When visitors speak to “real” though, their “use of the term focuses on truthfulness and honesty, rather than academic accuracy” (Hughes, 2011, p.135) Visitors want to feel immersed in the performance, as a representation of what actually happened, just as they want to feel transported to another time when they visit other parts of the site.

In evaluating the authenticity of their experience, visitors note details as well as the big picture. Visitor expectations for the experience at the museum play into that design. “Colonial Williamsburg staff work hard to not only present an authentic site but to maintain the institution’s reputation for authenticity” (Gable and Handler, 1996, p.571). Living history museums have taken information they learned from visitors and used it to create certain

experiences they perceive visitors expect, but that may not be the most accurate or complete historical interpretation. This can lead to a difficult balance between maintaining that ultimate authenticity that visitors expect and visitors' comfort, such as balancing modern amenities with historical accuracy of the site and the overall experience (Wilkening and Donnis, 2008). This need to appease the visitor authentic experience has been criticized throughout the 20th century, as Kate Stover (1989) notes, as "idealized" or "selective interpretations" (p.13).

This issue of creating selective interpretations to meet visitors' expectations for an authentic experience for living history museums has had impact on the uses of technology and narrative, in addition to visitor comfort discussed above. For example, interactive technology can facilitate an engaging and authentic experience, but only "if designed with a concern for the identity of the museum and for the interests and preferences of visitors in that context" (Ciolfi and McLoughlin, 2012, p.69). Living history museums must take into consideration the context of technology at the site and how it would add or detract from the authentic experience they aim to create, just as many museums struggle with today.

The story or experience that living history museums promote changes over time in response to visitor expectations, such as what and whose story is focused on in exhibits and programming. While authenticity is a long sought after goal at living history museums, it can also bring about complicated matters, as experienced in the 1980s and 1990s. "The gritty authenticity that living history museums tried to achieve in theory often hit a tense reality when one-on-one interactions between interpreters and visitors took place", with controversial aspects of the past often neglected so as not to make visitors uncomfortable (Allison, 2016, p. 29). Colonial Williamsburg addressed this and changed the focus of their experience in the late 20th century to focus on those people that were not the center of attention during the time, portraying

history from the eyes of the everyday person and not the elite (Handler and Gable, 1997).

Another example of this was when Colonial Williamsburg shifted focus of parts of the experience to include African American history at the site. The relative absence of this story until the 1970s was noted by those inside and outside the site. Colonial Williamsburg had been criticized for “inaccurate, simplistic and unrealistic view of history” (Stover, 1989, p.15). With a commitment to an authentic experience for visitors and accurate historical representation, Colonial Williamsburg made changes to the story and addressed interpretation of African American history and slavery at the site. Visitor expectations and criticisms can have lasting impact on how the story and experience is designed.

Living history museums share the goals of creating authentic experiences, and share similar struggles of maintaining visitor comfort and expectations, despite the major differences in their design. Having a deeper understanding of how the visitor experience is designed at these sites, specifically the role of objects in that design, is relevant and important for living history museums. The visitor experience at living history museums is the method that these institutions use to teach visitors about history and get them to think deeper about what, how, and why they happened. This study focuses on understanding how visitor experiences are created and the role of objects in creating that experience. It aims to give a greater understanding of what informs the design of visitor experiences, and therefore what living history museums can do for their visitors. As described above, there is extensive literature and research about the relationship between authentic objects and museums, designing experiences in museums, some of the ways that living history museums engage with visitors, and the tools of performance and theater in living history museums. What is unknown is how objects play into the larger design of living history museums authentic visitor experience. What is it about objects that make them important to the visitor

experience? What are the important characteristics and qualities of objects in the setting of a living history museum? These ideas are important to understanding the overall design of the visitor experience at living history museums today.

Chapter Three: Methods

The purpose of this research is to understand the role of objects in creating authentic experiences at living history museums. To understand the role of objects, there are four guiding research questions for this study:

1. What does “authentic experience” mean for staff creating the experience for visitors to living history museums?
2. What is the role of objects in the visitor experience at living history museums and how do they contribute to an authentic experience?
3. What characteristics or qualities of objects are important for staff when designing the visitor experience?
4. How does the staff understanding of the visitor experience fit into what staff perceive their visitors expect from their experience?

Methodological Approach

This research design used a qualitative case study approach. Since there are many different sizes and types of living history museums around the world, it is advantageous to employ a case study design so as not to generalize these findings to all living history museums but give specific insight and depth into the design of visitor experiences at sites that are similar in size and content (Thomas, 2011). The study examines the particular role of objects in an authentic visitor experience by focusing on large living history museums, which talk about American history and life, and use objects in multiple different ways with many staff involved in the design of the experience. Three different sites provide multiple lines of evidence to examine the role of objects in a particular living history museum setting. In addition, multiple different perspectives were therefore captured within and between institutions, providing multiple sources of evidence for the research questions, and strengthening the results of the study by providing viewpoints from different areas designing the visitor experience within and between institutions.

Site Selection

Sites for this research study were selected based on their design, size, history, and point of focus being American history. Of utmost importance was that the site was a living history museum that “[attempts] to simulate life in another time” (Anderson, 1992, p.456). Each site had to employ multiple ways to engage visitors with objects in order to provide a variety of opportunities to understand the use of objects in the visitor experience and how staff are involved in building that experience. In addition, each site must be focused on American history including, but not limited to, daily life, innovation, or significant figures in American history. Having sites that focused on different parts of American history and were developed in different ways was also important to understand if there was variation in the experience across sites based on the context and history of the site. Finally, each site must employ at least 25 full time staff and contained both indoor and outdoor components of the visitor experience. Sites also were chosen based on their geographic proximity to each other to enable me to travel and conduct interviews efficiently.

A description of each selected site, their current design, and significance to the study is provided as part of case descriptions in Chapter Four: Results and Discussion. The sites selected were: Greenfield Village at The Henry Ford, Colonial Williamsburg, and Conner Prairie (see Table 1).

Table 1*Name, Location, and Content Focus of Research Sites*

Site Name	Location	Content Focus
Greenfield Village at The Henry Ford	Dearborn, MI	18th-20th century, American life and innovation
Colonial Williamsburg	Williamsburg, VA	18th century, American Revolution
Conner Prairie	Fishers, IN	19th century, Prairie life and the Civil War

Participant Selection & Recruiting

Interviews with museum professionals at the three different sites selected above were used to understand the role of objects in the design of the visitor experience. Individuals were sought based on their role within the institution (see Table 2). Primarily, participants had to be current museum professionals at the institution. Preferred participants had to be actively involved in the design of the visitor experience and the role of objects in creating that experience at the institution. Some participants had recently moved to other departments within the institution, but had been extensively involved in building visitor experience for several years. Participants could include exhibit designers, curators, and educators. Preferably a variety of positions involved in the design of the visitor experience were sought. Comparing individuals with similar jobs was not possible at each site because the staff involved in the visitor designed varied with each site. For the most part, curators and interpretation managers were available and selected based on their wide variety of experience with many different positions within their institution and agreed to participate in the research. In addition to their role at the institution, the individuals had to have at least three years professional museum experience.

Potential participants were recruited primarily by e-mail and followed up by phone if additional explanation of the project was needed or participants had further questions. The recruitment email included a description of participation, the purpose of the research, and the criteria of involvement for the participant. It also included a fact sheet for each site with information about the interview, including the dates for conducting interviews, additional explanation of the purpose of the research, particulars for the interview, and a note explaining that the interview would be recorded and individuals could be directly quoted in the report unless otherwise indicated (see Appendix A). In addition, participants were emailed an outline of the interview a few weeks before the interview (see Appendix C). This step was included after some participants expressed interest in knowing the topics to be addressed beforehand. In the interest of consistency, all participants were given the outline beforehand. It was concluded that this would not inappropriately bias responses, but instead an outline given ahead of time allowed participants time to think through the topics and their own experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of eleven living history museum professionals (see Table 2). This included staff from a variety of positions within each institution who had different backgrounds in museum visitor experience design. The sample included exhibit designers, interpretation designers and managers, and curators.

Table 2*List of Study Participants*

Name	Institution	Job Title
Brian Egen	The Henry Ford	Executive Producer
Emily Kirk	The Henry Ford	Concept (Exhibit) Designer
Donna Braden	The Henry Ford	Curator of Public Life
Jim Johnson	The Henry Ford	Curator of Historic Structure and Landscapes
Ginny Kauffman	Colonial Williamsburg	Manager of Bassett Hall, Thomas Everard House, and Wetherburn's Tavern
Peter Inker	Colonial Williamsburg	Theresa A. & Lawrence C. Salameno Executive Director
Dan Moore	Colonial Williamsburg	Site Supervisor of the Governor's Palace
Amanda Keller	Colonial Williamsburg	Associate Curator for Historic Interiors and Household Accessories
Kim McCann	Conner Prairie	Assistant Manager of Interpretation
Michelle Evans	Conner Prairie	Interpretation Program Developer
Cathleen Donnelly	Conner Prairie	Exhibit Developer

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted on-site, face-to-face, by the researcher between March 16th and March 28th, 2017. Visiting the site allowed the researcher to record context points for what the participants were speaking of during the interview. Interviews were audio recorded and participants were encouraged to bring materials they felt would explain their points, or take the interview to the museum grounds to explain their points. Participants were asked for consent to be interviewed prior to the interview and given a chance to ask questions about the interview or research process (See Appendix B). Due to the depth and complicated nature of understanding

the entire visitor experience, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions and pursue interesting and salient points that came out of the interviews.

Interview questions were developed to answer the four primary research questions set out at the beginning of the study. Each research question was given a focus in each section, and the researcher developed multiple questions to help answer the research questions. Interview questions were split into four major categories (see Appendix B). The first section introduced the participant and gave background on their position within the institution. The second section asked participants to comment on what they think visitor expectations are and how visitor expectations played into their design, if at all. The third section asked participants to talk about how they use objects at their museum and in the design of the visitor experience. Building from the previous section, the fourth section asked participants to describe the visitor experience in more depth and how authenticity fits into that experience, if at all.

Data Analysis Procedure

Interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and subsequently transcribed using NVIVO™ software. Each open-ended question was coded based on emergent themes. Responses given for each interview were then analyzed using the coding rubric, based on the themes developed in each question. Each open-ended question was coded using language directly from interviews and then summarized into larger themes under different language when appropriate. For example, if a participant described an experience as being “fun and entertaining,” that would be categorized under ‘entertainment.’ A detailed explanation of the coding for each question, can be found in Appendix D.

Each question was analyzed using the coding rubric – calculating frequency of responses, context of the response within larger themes, and responses between institutions and by profession, when appropriate. After individual questions from the interview were coded and analyzed, they were then summarized in context of the study's larger research questions. The goal of the research was analyzed in context of all the research questions data.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Exemption

This research was granted IRB Exemption from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Washington on January 19th, 2017.

Limitations

This study aims to understand the “authentic” visitor experience and the role that objects play in that experience at living history museums. While the proposed research approach, methodology, and recruitment strategy contributed to a valid study, decisions that supported research efficiency and a reasonable scope resulted in certain limitations. One limitation of this research is that while living history museums define their experiences often as immersive, authentic experiences, how each site understands authenticity is not the same. Therefore, it can be difficult to make direct comparisons to the authenticity of the experiences as each institution's attempts a different type of authentic experience for their visitors.

Another limitation of this study is that it focuses on large living history museums that represent early American history and lifestyles, and who have at least 25 staff. There are a wide variety of living history museums in the United States, such as smaller community farm museums, medieval style living history museums, and smaller house museum sites. These sites

could provide a different perspective on how living history museums design the visitor experience that differ from those of large institutions. In addition, larger institutions have more resources with which they can provide a large depth of experiences and use for their artifacts. While this is a limit of the study, it does provide more understanding of ways in which objects in living history museums have or have been used.

A final limitation of this study is the ability to compare responses across professions. Each site that was contacted had different staff members that were involved in the design of the visitor experience, and some positions such as educators and exhibit staff, were not involved in the process at that each institution. This made it difficult to compare responses within and across museum professions. However, it does provide valuable lesson illustrating that each institution has very different structures set up for the design of the visitor experience. This could be researched further to see how this may or may not affect how the visitor experience is designed.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study is to understand the role of objects in creating authentic experiences for visitors to living history museums. Four research questions guided the interviews: (1) What is the role of objects in the visitor experience at living history museums and how do they contribute to an authentic experience? (2) What characteristics or qualities of objects are important for staff when designing the visitor experience? (3) How does the staff understanding of the visitor experience fit into what staff perceive their visitors expect from their experience? (4) What does “authentic experience” mean for staff creating the experience for visitors to living history museums? The findings of this research speak to each area, and therefore the specific role of objects.

The findings of this research are organized into two major sections: results by case, and a discussion of overall trends across cases. Each of these section is divided into two parts, each with a subcategory. The first part describes the visitor experience at the site and what informs that design; followed by an analysis of what an authentic experience means to staff. The second part focused on staff discussions of how objects fit into the visitor experience generally, and then how they fit into an authentic experience.

Results by Case:

Greenfield Village at The Henry Ford: Dearborn, MI

Introduction. Henry Ford began collecting pieces of American daily life and innovation in 1914 (“Henry Ford: Collector – The Henry Ford,” 2017). Henry Ford chose to collect the objects of ordinary people because “History is more or less bunk” and he wanted to “show people a kind of history that wasn’t bunk” (“Henry Ford: Collector – The Henry Ford,” 2017).

“[Henry Ford] believed that the history of ordinary Americans, as embodied in the ordinary objects they made and used, could be presented to a wide public” (Conn, 1998, p. 152). To show people the American history Henry Ford envisioned, he developed the Museum and Village.

The Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation focuses on American innovation and industrial past, while the Village was meant to focus on village life (Conn, 2000). All the buildings were moved to the site of Greenfield Village in Dearborn, MI from other areas of the state, country, and world. By bringing all the buildings together (Menlo Park re-creation, Susquehanna Plantation, and the Wright Home) Greenfield Village was an “[attempt] to tell the story of American history through objects” (Conn, 2000). The buildings are not from the same time period or even location, but help tell the story of important figures in American history, such as the Wright Brothers, and the daily life of people from different periods of American history.

The organization’s mission is: “The Henry Ford provides unique educational experiences based on authentic objects, stories, and lives from America’s traditions of ingenuity, resourcefulness, and innovation. Our purpose is to inspire people to learn from these traditions to help shape a better future” (The Henry Ford, 1/12/2017). In 2015, The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village welcomed more than 1.7 million visitors (Ford, 2016). Greenfield Village is open primarily in the spring to fall months. The Village is more than 80 acres and contains 83 authentic historic structures (“Visit Greenfield Village - Tickets, Hours - The Henry Ford,” 2017). In addition to visiting the different structures set-up with artifacts and interpreters, visitors can take a ride in a Model-T or a historic carousel or attend special events throughout the year.

The unique history of how Greenfield Village came to be and the various ways that they use objects and engage with visitors made them an important site to include in the study. The

conglomeration of historic structures removed from their original context and the ways that objects are used in the structures to help return them to a specific time period where they were originally provide an interesting perspective on the role of objects in living history museums.

Visitor Experience at Greenfield Village. Staff at Greenfield Village describe that they hope to create a rich visitor experience where visitors are immersed in the sights, sounds, and smells of the Village. As Donna Braden, Curator of Public Life mentioned, they hope visitors lose themselves in the “park like setting” that is Greenfield Village. Staff members also said that it should be an experience that impacts visitors’ emotions, making the experience more memorable and inspiring visitors to take action or think differently about something. In addition, staff hoped that these experiences built connections with visitor to their own lives. Brian Egen described how they try to inspire visitors and encourage them to interrupt realities of their everyday lives — “In a way, you have this raw petri dish of emotions with the guests and what we always try to do, or what I try to do, with these immersion experiences is to touch that sort of secret place of awe in everybody that can inspire them...”

The Henry Ford does informal visitor studies and some marketing research to inform their visitor experience. Staff members described that they believe visitors expect to be immersed in the past. They come to see historical buildings, to learn, for social reasons, and even for the large open spaces and break from reality (the latter specifically noted by curators). Even though each structure in the Village is project-goal based, staff expressed that they do take into account the things they hear from visitors and how they see visitors interact in their designs.

What Does An Authentic Experience Mean? All staff interviewed expressed that an authentic experience was a major part of their interpretive/design goal for Greenfield Village. They explained that an authentic experience meant that visitors could immerse themselves in the

past, stepping back in time and “experiencing a moment in time.” As one staff member described, it could even be a subconscious experience. Thus, the minute details are very important to getting the experience right. As Brian Egen described, the Village has antique heirloom vegetables and crops growing in the gardens and fields as well as antique breeds of livestock such as the wrinkly Merino sheep to fit 19th century styles. Emily Kirk, Concept Designer, included that authentic visitor experiences at the Village cause visitors to reflect on their own lives, making the experience more memorable.

How do Objects Fit in These Experiences? All staff interviewed said that objects are important and help facilitate the immersive visitor experience by telling stories about the people that lived in the buildings, and what activities happened there. Objects help to engage visitors’ senses by providing something to touch, smell, or hear. For Donna Braden, objects become a “comfortable entree for visitors when they are in a building...a little intimidated by a live person standing there particularly if they’re in a historic outfit”. There are certain characteristics and qualities that were important for choosing objects to be a part of the experience including, the ability of the object to tell the story of a space and be authentic to a time period or an accurate reproduction. Objects should work together as part of an assemblage to create a setting, a story, and a time period. Individual characteristics will vary based on what you want to achieve in each space, but should be antique period artifacts or authentic representations. As Brian Egen describes, it is about “using the power of objects to help tell the story”. Objects help create the narrative of the historic structures. They make the space feel like the time period.



Figure 1: General Store in Greenfield Village, 2008 (Courtesy Yunjae Lee).

Staff also discussed ways that objects can detract from the authentic experience. Several of The Henry Ford staff interviewed believed that the authentic experience is disrupted if the idea of the objects is confusing or misrepresents what something means. If something is not authentic, it can also create false assumptions about the past if people do not have a frame of reference of what they are looking at. At the 1880s Firestone Farm in Greenfield Village, Brian Egen remarked how they use square cut nails in the fencing even though wire cut were available at the time. He described that guests may think that the staff cut corners with the nails by using wire nails instead of square cut nails “because the average person doesn’t realize that wire cut nails were around just after the Civil War and it would have been...equally prevalent as the square cut nails”.

Summary. The visitor experience at Greenfield Village is one where visitors feel that they have stepped into another time. They can become enveloped in stories of the people that

lived in the different historic structures. Staff described the experience as authentic, adding that the experience invites visitors to make connections from the past to their own lives, making it especially memorable. Despite drawbacks, objects play an important part in immersing visitors in the times that each structure and area at Greenfield Village, and making connections from the past to the present.

Colonial Williamsburg: Williamsburg, VA

Colonial Williamsburg is arguably the most well-known living history museum in the United States with a multitude of historic structures documenting early American life in one of the first colonial towns of early America. Williamsburg was once the capital of Virginia, a bustling center of change for early America when the revolution was taking hold. In 1926, Reverend Dr. W.A.R Goodwin shared his project of preserving the structures with John D. Rockefeller and Rockefeller eventually agreed to fund the project with the help of architect William G. Perry (Handler & Gable, 1997) . Although there was some opposition by local residents of Williamsburg to build the museum, Goodwin was eventually able to convince most of the residents that it was a beneficial endeavor for the area (Handler & Gable, 1997).

Today, Colonial Williamsburg stands as a private, non-profit educational museum, teaching, researching, and engaging visitors. The mission of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation is “to feed the human spirit by sharing America’s enduring story” (“Mission of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation,” 2017). In addition, their “mission is to be a center for history and citizenship, encouraging national and international audiences to learn from the past through the preservation, restoration, and presentation of 18th-century Williamsburg and the study, interpretation, and teaching of America's founding democratic principles”(“About Colonial

Williamsburg : History.org” 2017). Visitors can engage with first and third person interpreters on site, visit historic structures, and attend programs and activities while visiting Colonial Williamsburg. In 2015, Colonial Williamsburg sold over 500,000 tickets to the historic structure, but welcomed many more visitors to the site (as it is free to enter the site and walk up and down historical Colonial Williamsburg) (Foundation, 2015).

This site was important to include in this study due to its impact on living history museum design, extent of the site buildings, variety of objects used, and the ways that other tools are used with objects (such as performance). Staff at Colonial Williamsburg sometimes do extensive research on even the smallest things, such as locks on doors, to provide an incredibly detailed authentic visitor experience (Handler and Gable 1997). They have a large collection of original artifacts, working shops, and both first and third person costumed interpreters across the site to engage with visitors. Unlike the other sites in this study, all structures are original or were reconstructed on their original site. Colonial Williamsburg has received criticism in the past from their visitors and museum scholars for not including contentious parts of history, such as slavery. Since the later part of the 20th century, it has made changes to address these concerns in an attempt to present a more complete story of life in Colonial Williamsburg. Since they have undergone many changes to the design of the visitor experience in response to criticism and interpretation of the site and its objects, Colonial Williamsburg is an important site for this study.

The Visitor Experience at Colonial Williamsburg. Staff described Colonial Williamsburg as an immersive experience that shares stories of the past and builds connections between visitors, the past, and their own lives. However, there was variation in the way they defined what an immersive experience looks like as a representation of the past or as close to actual as possible. Some staff focused more on a traditional way of understanding the visitor

experience. For example, education and authenticity was most important for Amanda Keller, Associate Curator for Historic Interiors and Household Accessories, who works closely with furnishing houses, programs, and spaces with objects. Other staff focused on immersion and storytelling. According to Executive Director Peter Inker, at the core of the experience is the story of the human experience, aspirations, and 18th century life. Peter Inker and Dan Moore (Site Supervisor of the Governor's Palace) emphasized that they are working towards an immersive experience that is customizable, where the visitor can go at their own speed and learn in different ways by having conversations, going on a tour, or free flow. Peter Inker described what Colonial Williamsburg is hoping to do:

“We are aiming to create a ‘develop their own journey’ as it were, through Colonial Williamsburg instead of creating the old fashion guiding tour where someone picks you up and leads you through very (passively)... We will provide set itineraries and suggestions, but really try to provide as much access to everything as possible, that [visitors] can then make their [own] decisions.”

This new approach is about an experience that is guided by the visitors' interests and situation. To inform this design, staff at Colonial Williamsburg use some visitor studies and marketing data. Many staff still rely on informal conversations with visitors and watching their interactions in the spaces to help them understand visitors' interests, needs, and wants. However, Peter Inker also noted how this is a part of their recent training with the National Association for Interpretation (NAI), in order to make the experience more enjoyable and personalized for each guest during their visit.

What Does an Authentic Experience Mean? For staff at Colonial Williamsburg, an authentic experience meant you are essentially “true and honest” in your representations (as Peter Inker described). If those representations are about being exactly to the time period or a simile is where staff varied. Staff agreed that an authentic experience should immerse visitors in as close to the late 18th century as Colonial Williamsburg can get. Interpretation and management staff noted that it is not about necessarily making visitors feel as if they are in the past, but part of the interpretation and its stories. Amanda Keller noted that an authentic experience to her meant visitors are as close to the time period as possible. She feels it is important as her role of an assistant curator to strive towards an authentic, immersive experience as possible. Multiple staff interviewed expressed how Colonial Williamsburg's visitor experience was currently undergoing somewhat of a reexamination toward making it more visitor-oriented and interactive, which could explain why their interpretations of “authentic” somewhat fluctuated.

How Do Objects Fit in These Experiences? Objects help to tell visitors about the people and stories of the past. Staff described the variety of objects that make up the visitor experience, from buildings to sherds of pottery recovered from archaeological excavations of the sites. Staff at Colonial Williamsburg research and design every small part of the experience, down to tiny objects from the door handles to the buttons of clothes (Handler and Gable, 1997). Staff at Colonial Williamsburg noted the ability of objects to make a “space come to life” and get people curious about the past and those stories, sparking their interest in history and thinking more deeply about the past. As Ginny Kauffman, Manager of Bassett Hall, Thomas Everard House, and Wetherburn’s Tavern, described of the small objects used throughout Bassett Hall:

“Whether it's the glasses or a snuff box or something, you know the little things...guests love to want to know what the little things are because they can see them and their curious about them”.

Staff also noted the important ways objects can engage all the senses — like the smell when firing a musket, providing a sensory experience that helps people learn in a much more tangible way. In addition, objects provide connection to those stories and overall enhance the visitor experience or, as Amanda Keller noted, be part of the experience like props in a performance.



Figure 2: Bassett Hall, Colonial Williamsburg, Marina Mayne 2017.

There are certain characteristics and qualities about objects that are important. Objects that are chosen must connect visitors to the time period, people, and key messages of a space. They also need to connect to each other — objects are all part of an assemblage. Staff

additionally said that objects should be antiques or accurate reproductions. Amanda Keller chooses objects, both antiques and reproductions, to be a part of a space noted that objects are an “authentic backdrop.” She describes: “I want those objects to speak for themselves to a certain extent and to convey what people [in the past] thought was important to them... [Objects] tell stories and so I want hopefully my objects to tell those stories.”

Staff also discussed ways that objects can detract from an authentic experience, such as disrupting the visitor from the overall context and story if it is not a correct period artifact or representation, or if a visitor approaches an object in a fetishized manner. In addition, two staff highlighted how authentic and reproduction objects can detract for some visitors but not others.

Summary. Colonial Williamsburg staff described that their visitor experience is immersive and storytelling, and becoming customizable. They want visitors to feel as if they are immersed in the stories of the people that lived there and make connections to their own lives and experiences. Objects are important to providing tangible evidence of these stories and making those connections. There does exist some variation between staff over what is most important in the designing the authentic visitor experience.

Conner Prairie: Fishers, IN

Conner Prairie Interactive History Park was built around the site of a historic structure near Indianapolis, Indiana. William Conner lived there with his family in the early 1800s and made a living in the area by buying and selling furs to Native peoples (“History - Conner Prairie Interactive History Park,” 2017). The land went through many owners, and in 1934 Eli Lilly bought the house and opened the site to the public as a place for people to learn about American history and heritage (“History - Conner Prairie Interactive History Park,” 2017).

It was in the 1970s when the space began its transformation into a living history museum (“History - Conner Prairie Interactive History Park,” 2017). Today the park is well known for its interactive and engaging programming about early American history set in the 19th century. Their mission is “to inspire curiosity and foster learning about Indiana’s past by providing engaging, individualized and unique experiences” (“Our Reasons to Believe - Conner Prairie Interactive History Park,” 2017). They do this through a variety of ways such as hands-on activities and programs that engage visitors of all ages (“Driven by Our Mission - Conner Prairie Interactive History Park,” 2017). Their most recent large exhibit addition titled “1863 Civil War Journey- Raid on Indiana” drew much praise as a new immersive way to engage visitors of all ages in American history (Morris, 2011). In 2016, Conner Prairie welcomed over 390,000 visitors (McGowan, 2017).

This site is meaningful to the study because it provides an example of a living history museum that is built part in context of an original historic structure (Conner House) but also brought in historic buildings from Indiana. However, instead of focusing on the original objects, the Museum focuses on the interactive experiences it can provide for visitors with reproductions. It uses multiple methods of engagement with objects, such as hands-on activities and first and third person interpretation, to engage visitors of all ages in early American history, providing the chance to understand how objects can be used in the design of the visitor experience in new ways.

The Visitor Experience at Conner Prairie. Staff described Conner Prairie as making their experience about the visitor - it should be relevant to the visitor, make connections between visitors and history, and be interactive in multiple ways. Multiple staff noted that this was rooted in their “Opening Doors” concept for the visitor experience in which you engage the visitor

where their interests lie. Staff focus on sparking their curiosity and make connections to the visitors' lives through the interactive experiences with the past. As Kim McCann, Assistant Manager of Interpretation noted this type of experience "allows for us to have much deeper and more meaningful conversations and interactions with people". Staff explained that each house or structure should tell a story about the people or time period it represents, but that the visitor should have a choice to access that story in multiple ways, either physically through interaction with objects, or intellectually with interpreters and staff, multimedia, and labels.

Conner Prairie staff noted that they do extensive visitor studies and audience research to inform their design of new spaces, and how to improve older spaces and experiences. The depth and variety of evaluation that Conner Prairie does help them evaluate the visitor experience and what their visitors expect, designing spaces that better accommodate audiences they are reaching and thinking about audiences they may not be reaching.

What Does An Authentic Experience Mean? As Kim McCann describes, an authentic experience is specifically about engaging visitors in a way so that they "fall into and play the game" at Conner Prairie. This involves interacting with first-person interpreters, making something, or training for a skill. It also means using senses to build connections between interpreters and visitors. Kim McCann further explains that "authenticity comes through in the interaction as well. It is a conversation...it's not a monologue, it's a dialogue. We really feel strongly that the way we do our interpretation...allows the guest to package and design their own experience." Staff also described that an authentic experience means that the information is an appropriate representation of the time period and gives a sense of the past.

How Do Objects Fit in These Experiences? Staff at Conner Prairie discussed that objects are an important part of the visitor experience that connect the visitors to the people and

stories of the past. It is not necessary that the objects are antiques but rather accurate representations (reproductions) from the past that are hands-on. Staff described that using objects helps visitors think about how things worked, ask questions, learn, and spark interest and excitement. As Cathy Donnelly, Exhibit Developer, describes, “That accessibility to objects and being able to pick them up and use them and try them out, something you are not familiar with...is a wonderful experience”. Conner Prairie also includes technology in their experiences as objects, such as video and touch screen interactives, built into historic looking furniture in the historic structures. A visitor could therefore learn about cooking on a hearth through a video, instead of talking to an interpreter if that is what they prefer. Staff describe that technology adds another option for visitors to learn about the stories while not detracting from the overall visitor experience.



Figure 3: Changing Video Mirror at Conner House, Marina Mayne 2017.

When staff described the characteristics and qualities of objects that are important, they varied by the objects role in a space. The staff frequently mentioned that objects should help visitors make connections or relate to the visitors' own life. They should also tell stories or connect to that time period, and spark discussion and thinking. In addition, objects should be durable and safe for visitors to handle. When speaking to an authentic experience, staff specifically noted that objects also contributed to an all-around sensory experience where visitors were engaged in the time period through sounds and smells.

Conner Prairie staff also discussed some ways that objects detract from an authentic experience. For example, some staff described that visitors sometimes become too comfortable touching everything and as a result handle things that aren't meant to be handled such as grabbing interpreters' belongings or other objects in exhibits and buildings that are not meant to be climbed on. Another staff member noted that it is a balance where too many objects can overwhelm some people while not enough objects can mean people pay less attention. They also acknowledged that not everyone engages with history the way Conner Prairie designs the experience so sometimes hands-on interactives just do not work for certain visitors.

Summary. Conner Prairie staff describe their experience as immersive in that the visitor can learn about the past, stories, and people through hands-on, interactive methods. Visitors can customize what they want to learn about. Therefore, objects are very important, particularly in that visitors can use them to learn. An authentic visitor experience specifically at Conner Prairie means meaningful interaction and dialogue of guests with these stories.

Discussion

Section 1: What is the visitor experience sites try to create?

Individuals within each of the three sites often had a similar sense of what type of experience they were hoping to create. Analysis from the interviews resulted in the major themes identified by staff, outlined in Table 3 below, in no particular order.

Table 3

Visitor Experience Themes Across Sites

Major Themes Across Sites	
Immersive	Enjoyable
Relevant	Educational
Secondary Themes: Site Specific or Minor Themes	
Emotional	Interactive
Customizable	Authentic

The most common visitor experience themes across sites were: immersive, in storytelling, and relevant, in that it makes connections for the visitor between the past and their own lives. This is a variation from the traditional understanding of the visitor experience at living history museums as “stepping back in time”, as Anderson (1992) described. While the idea of “stepping into another time” was mentioned by some staff at each of the three sites, it is not their top priority.

In addition to being a relevant and immersive experience, sites emphasized the need for the visitor to be and enjoyable experience, both comfortable and have fun while also ideally learning or thinking about something in the past, present, or both. The experience should not be

daunting or overwhelming, which can occur if visitors are unfamiliar with the styles of interpretation (such as first-person interpretation) or subject matter. Staff at each site expressed similar sentiments that they want guests to feel welcome and have fun, even if all the educational or site goals are not met. If visitors interacted or engaged, either physically or intellectually with the material, then that was a successful experience. It became apparent that sites expressed an interest in focusing more on the visitor, and less on specific goals and outcomes.

In order to inform their design of the visitor experience, each site used visitor studies to a varying degree, and the understanding of visitor expectations has affected how the visitor experience is designed. Sites also recognized that the design of the visitor experience is always in flux. Since staff expressed an interest in the stories and history of their sites being relevant to the visitor, the site itself will have to grow and be relevant to changing audiences and attitudes of its visitors. Visitor experiences must grow, adapt, and be revisited in order to be successful.

Section 2: What does an authentic visitor experience mean?

When defining what an authentic experience means for their visitors, staff provided explanations that were a conglomeration of themes and ideas. Table 4 highlights the themes identified by participants when asked what, if anything, an authentic experience meant to them.

Table 4*Themes for Describing an Authentic Experience²*

Major Themes
Immersive
Accurate Reflection of Past
Simile Representation
Has Authentic Objects
Make Connections/Connected To
Subthemes/Site Specific
Step Back in Time
Design Own Experience
Interactive
Engage Senses
Elicits Conversation
Can Use Objects

Many staff across sites described that an authentic experience meant an immersive experience: immersed in the time period, a sense of the past, or stories of the site, that could also be a subconscious experience. An authentic experience was most important for Greenfield Village staff, less for Colonial Williamsburg, and even less for Conner Prairie. This correlates to their interpretation strategy, as when the importance of an authentic experience declines, the level of time taken to customize the experience for each visitor increases and there is less emphasis on specific goals for each part of the historic structure. It was only at Greenfield Village that all staff

² Bolded terms represent large themes, with subthemes underneath that are related to the larger theme, but identified by participants less frequently or when major themes represented more than one thing to them.

members noted that visitors should feel immersed in that time period. As Brian Egen noted for their visitors, “we want them, for them to feel as though...they’re experiencing a moment in time, a slice of time.” An authentic experience also meant that it was an accurate representation of the past, either because it was a simile of what was in the past as best the staff could determine, or that it had authentic artifacts. In addition, majority of staff described that the experience makes connections for the visitor between the past and present, and current or reoccurring issues today.

Sites shared some benefits and drawbacks to an authentic experience (see Table 5).

Benefits were related to the goals of the visitor experience, that through an authentic experience guests are more likely to be immersed in historic stories about people or the place, and have more tangible and sensory tools to understand the past. For example, staff described that making connections between the past and present (visitors own lives) becomes easier for guests when they can do something, hear something, or see something (like cooking). The benefits reflect a sentiment for all staff that authentic experiences help their visitors learn about the past, but also build connection, inspire, and rejuvenate them in the present. As Donna Braden described, you don’t and shouldn’t expect visitors to learn all the subtle learning goals or conceptual points that curators include in their design, but these ideas may be translated by presenters or picked up as visitors interact with the space. As Donna Braden stated, “There were specific reasons why every single thing is [in the buildings]. Visitors don’t get most of it, but that’s ok because they sort of subconsciously are immersed and feel transported ... I went to another place, it was rejuvenating, [and] it was restorative...” She described that visitors don’t necessarily learn by essentially lecturing them about history, and they shouldn’t be expected to because they learn in different ways, especially in living history museums. Figure 5 also highlights other site specific themes

such as how an authentic experience increases an institution's credibility and increases visitation for their museum, or can knock down stereotypes about the past.

Table 5*Benefits and Drawbacks of an Authentic Experience*

Benefits	Drawbacks
Shared Across Sites	
Immerses Visitor (in past, time, place, story)	Resource heavy (time, money, work)
Makes Connections	Object Loss (broken or stolen)
Inspires	Accessibility
Increases Visitation	Confusing or Overwhelming to Visitor
Site Specific - Not Shared Across All Sites*	
Rejuvenating (HF)	Create false understanding of present (HF)
Knocks down stereotypes (HF)	Doesn't Reach All Audiences (CW)
Gives Institution Credibility (CW)	Hard to Keep Updated (HF, CP)
Comfortable (CW)	Detrimental to interpreters (CW)
Customizable (CP)	Requires compromise in design (CW)
Educational - Engaging & Hands On (CW, CP)	No Barriers and Too many Barriers (CW, CP)

*Figure 5 Key: HF= The Henry Ford, CW= Colonial Williamsburg, CP= Conner Prairie

The major shared drawback across the sites was resources. Maintaining an authentic experience, even though it was somewhat different at each site, took a lot of resources to maintain including money, time, and staff. Another drawback expressed at each site was issues with accessibility. Most of the historic structures are not ADA accessible, but in order to maintain the historic structure as it were in the 18th or 19th century, you could not alter it except

for a ramp outside. A third major drawback was the ability of authentic representations of the past and interpretation to be confusing or overwhelming, specifically for first person interpretation. Guests are uncomfortable and unsure of how to play along, or engage with interpreters and therefore are less likely to feel immersed in the experience. Other drawbacks were site specific or could not be replicated at other sites. For example, Colonial Williamsburg mentioned that some first person staff, playing the role of slaves, had been mistreated (although infrequently) by guests, as they become a little too immersed in the site representation and time period.

Section 3: How do objects fit into that visitor experience?

Objects are a major element that shape the visitor experience at all three living history museums. Objects refer to any tangible thing involved in simulating the historical visitor experience at a living history museum. This includes objects that are a part of accessioned material in the collection, but also objects used for educational purposes such as reproductions. Every staff member interviewed stated the importance of objects in building the visitor experiences they hoped to create, stating that objects help immerse visitors in stories, make connections, and build inspiration. For example, Brian Egen stated that when talking with staff: “I would explain to staff that every object tells a part of the story. So, whether it’s you in period clothing as part of an object, in a sense that you’re part of the set”. Peter Inker noted that “[objects are] a key component because essentially they’re [a] tangible carrier of message that allows a story to be told”. Speaking to the redesign of the William Conner House at Conner Prairie, Michelle Evans, Interpretation Program Developer, noted that “(she loves) the way that more objects in the house gives a chance to tell more stories”.

It was evident that the position of individuals within an institution did, at times, play a role in how they understood the role of objects in the visitor experience. While certain sub-themes were more prevalent among sites, that does not exclude them from being mentioned at the other sites. For example, Emily Kirk at The Henry Ford noted that objects are important to engaging the senses and help visitors learn as a result, a sentiment emphasized at Conner Prairie.

There were certain qualities and characteristics that were important for choosing objects to be part of the visitor experience. Characteristics were related to the physical or tangible aspects of the objects such as how old it is, whereas qualities were related to the intangible aspects of the object, such as its relationship to other objects. This varied based on the type of experience a staff member was trying to create in a space. The major characteristics and qualities that staff described are shown below in Table 6.

Table 6

Characteristics and Qualities of Objects³

Characteristics	Qualities
Major Themes	
Authentic	Immersive Design
Interactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tells a story
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provides Connections
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inspires
Sub Themes/Site Specific	
Durable	Fits Overall Context
	Trigger Action from Visitor
	Helps Teach

³ These characteristics and qualities of objects (Figure 6) important to building the visitor experience represent the range of responses from the three different sites. Sub-themes occurred, but were site-specific and discussed in more detail therefore in each site descriptions.

Characteristics. All sites recognized that objects should be authentic, meaning that they should be from a specific time period they are trying to represent, or should be an accurate representation of an object from that time period. For example, Brian Egen explained that every detail of every object must be authentic - of the time period or a very close representation of that:

“All of the vegetables that we grow, there are no hybrids, all the livestock are [period appropriate] varieties, you know we have short horn cattle as opposed to sort of modern breeds, we [have] Merino sheep, which the firestone family raised... So we’ve taken even a step further and back, breeding our Merino sheep to have the appearance that they did in the 19th century... That is authentic detail”.

In addition, some objects, but not all, should be interactive in a physical way where they can be touched, used, or perhaps smelled or heard, like an antique piano.

Other characteristics became site-specific in their emphasis. Conner Prairie emphasized an object’s durability and the ability for them to be used on their sites. This reflects the emphasis Conner Prairie has on creating an interactive and customizable experience for their visitors where objects are manipulated and handled frequently, and the where using antique period artifacts are not as necessary or feasible.

Qualities. In terms of qualities, staff at each site emphasize that objects in the context of immersion and storytelling, should be relatable to visitors. As Ginny Kauffman (CW) noted of Bassett Hall, the former residence of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller at Williamsburg:

“We’ve got things in Bassett Hall as I said were owned by (Mr. and Mrs. Rockefeller). Some of the smalls we have like his money clip or shaving kit, or maybe a dress or something that belonged to them, so as you talk about those rooms, and you talk about

them we try and make a connection to them, and telling a story by using an object or two to help tell your story...”

In addition, objects for all sites must support the whole message, room, or story that is being represented to be an appropriate addition to the space. As Peter Inker at Colonial Williamsburg noted, “when objects are chosen, their very much chosen as an assemblage...It’s not about an individual object...The object in itself is kind of the center of the web that kind of spread out to all these [connections]”. The object is one piece of building an authentic experience.

The emphasis on different object characteristics was related to the type of visitor experience each site is hoping to create: The Henry Ford staff focused on how authentic period artifacts build connections, Colonial Williamsburg staff focused on the ways objects can provide connections and support an assemblage, and Conner Prairie Staff spoke more the ability to connect objects physically and spark conversations (support each visitor's unique interests). These three sites indicate that stories and the human story in particular are important in the sites mission, and that the traditional experiences and emphasis on traditional learning in living history museums is no longer the focus. Instead, and objects play various roles to different degrees in meeting institutional goals, and immersive storytelling experiences.

Section 4: Where do objects fit in an authentic experience?

Objects play an important part in the visitor experience and specifically an authentic experience. Objects both add to the experience, but they also detract (see Table 7). Whether there are similarities and differences in the benefits and detractors depends on how the sites use objects to create their authentic visitor experiences.

Table 7*How Objects Add and Detract from the Visitor Experience*

How Objects Add	How Objects Detract
Major Themes – Shared Across Sites	
Increase Immersion	Can Disrupt Story
Tell Part of Story	Create False Assumptions about past/present
Create Environment	Create Focus on Wrong things/Distracting
Build Curiosity	Can be Overwhelming or Confusing
Engage Senses	
Minor Themes or Site Specific*	
Assist Programming (CW, CP)	Fetishize objects (CW)
Bring Content to Life (HF)	Less Hands On Experiences (CW)
Create Connections (CW, CP)	Too Comfortable with Objects (CP)
Create Comfort (HF)	

**Figure 7 Key: HF= The Henry Ford, CW= Colonial Williamsburg, CP= Conner Prairie*

Objects are important to building the authentic experience by helping to provide tangible connections. An object can give a visitor an idea of what something looks like, how it works, what it does, and engage their senses. As Cathleen Donnelly noted, “I think [objects are] really good for kinesthetic learning. I think people, particularly kids, they want to know how something works, they just want to get their hands on it and try it. People learn physically too and I think objects are ideal for that.” Subsequently, visitors can make connections to objects and ideas in their own lives. The objects bring the content and the past people to life, telling part of a story. As staff described, this can be as small as a house inventory that Colonial Williamsburg uses to talk about what people owned, or large gardens behind the Daggett and Firestone Farms at Greenfield Village. Objects should also be able to help build curiosity in the visitor, to think more or differently.

There are occasionally ways that objects can detract from the authentic experience, even when the objects themselves are authentic—like antique artifacts. If visitors do not have an understanding of the past and all its little details, objects can create false assumptions about what is an accurate period artifact or representation, and how things worked. For example, staff at Greenfield Village noted that sometimes if visitors see a specific type of furniture or farm equipment, they assume everyone had that furniture or was always using that equipment, when perhaps it was used only occasionally or during a very specific time period. This can also take the form of artifacts that may appear modern, but were common at earlier time periods, like the wire nails in the 19th century as described above.

Some ways objects detract spoke to site specific issues. For example, Conner Prairie staff described that the ability to touch everything makes guests feel like they can do whatever they want and get too comfortable, thus making the immersive experience detrimental for the museum or that too many objects can be overwhelming for visitors of all ages, and may result in no engagement at all.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to understand the role of objects in creating authentic experiences for visitors to living history museums. In an effort to provide more context to the various ways in which living history museums build their unique experiences, eleven museum professionals involved in the design of the visitor experience at three museums (Greenfield Village at The Henry Ford, Colonial Williamsburg, and Conner Prairie) were interviewed. Four questions guided the research:

5. What does “authentic experience” mean for staff creating the experience for visitors to living history museums?
6. What is the role of objects in the visitor experience at living history museums and how do they contribute to an authentic experience?
7. What characteristics or qualities of objects are important for staff when designing the visitor experience?
8. How does the staff understanding of the visitor experience fit into what staff perceive their visitors expect from their experience?

These questions provided the framework for the study and development of the instrument used for the interviews. The following sections summarize the broad themes uncovered through this research, and implications.

What is the Role of Objects in Creating Authentic Experiences?

Living history museums are facing a crisis with dropping visitation rates as people choose to attend other experience-based sites. Even in this past January of 2017, Colonial Williamsburg has been forced to lay off staff due to declines in visitation, even though donations and gifts remain stable (Zhan, 2017). Living history museums provide an experience for visitors that is often referred to as an authentic experience — one in which visitors feel as though they are in another time. As noted by those interviewed at Colonial Williamsburg, despite recent hardships, they are confident that visitation will increase as a result of the changes to the visitor

experience. These changes were centered on creating a customizable and immersive experience using objects in interactive and engaging ways. While the role and experience are changing with changes to visitors interests, living history museums still regard objects and authentic experiences as important in the overall design of an immersive visitors experience—one that values stories of the past and brings history to life. Objects solicit immersive experiences and help tell stories and get visitors to think about the past and present if the experience is designed well. Making the experience relevant through objects makes visitors want to come back.

The exploration of designing an authentic visitor experience, and the ways objects fits into the authentic visitor experience at these three sites (Greenfield Village, Colonial Williamsburg, and Conner Prairie) give context to the ways that living history museums are reimagining the visitor experience and the role of objects in these spaces. This study helps inform the field of museums that the role of objects in creating authentic experiences at these three sites is not singular nor homogenous. Objects play multiple roles across the sites and depending on the staff member you talk to, can play different roles even within sites. Understanding these roles gives context to the ways that living history museums and other museums can use objects to not just teach visitors, but build meaningful experiences for visitors that keeps them engaged long term.

There was significant agreement that objects are important for immersing visitors in either the past or the stories of the past and the people that inhabited the structures at museum sites. Despite the differences in time periods, methods of interacting with visitors, and understandings of the visitor experience, each site expressed the importance of this role. The significance and impact that a variety of objects can have in building these experiences was highlighted in this research. Food, animals, smells, the yard, and an increasing number of

reproduced objects are now considered an integral piece of the authentic experience in response to visitors' expectations and the types of immersive stories the sites want to tell. This study provides a greater understanding to the unique and varied ways that three sites (Greenfield Village, Colonial Williamsburg, and Conner Prairie) create authentic experiences using objects at their sites and speaks to the multitude of ways that historical sites and houses can reach out to visitors through unique engaging, immersive experiences. In addition, this study provides in-depth analysis of the ways that current museum professionals understand the authentic visitor experience and how objects fit. Further research into a comparison of visitor experience of these experiences will inform how to continue to grow visitation by providing rewarding authentic experiences for both institutions and visitors.

What is Success for Authentic Experiences?

Success in using objects in creating authentic experiences for visitors takes other forms besides increasing visitation. During the interviews, a common discussion grew out of the ideas discussed in creating the authentic visitor experience — what success looks like for an authentic experience and objects in that experience. Staff pointed out what they considered that general, recognizable versions of success for a museum: if people come back, if they buy memberships, if visitation increases because other visitors are sharing their experience at the site. Aside from the more quantitative measures of success, sites spoke to how visitors use the objects and what they take away from what they learned or experienced as success. The experience that visitors have when they visit the museum, and the way that objects illicit those unique and varied experiences was important to building success. If visitors feel connected to the past and present; if their experiences spark discussions and questions, and get them to think deeper, then success has been

reached at all of the sites. In addition seeing visible signs from visitors that was sparked by objects and interactions with those objects, such as if they are excited, nodding, thinking, and involved in conversation, then creating the authentic experience and overall immersive experience has been successful. This study helped uncover an understanding of how site goals influence authentic visitor experience design and how objects are used in those spaces to build specific types of experience. Sites feel that more visitors will come and come more frequently if the experience they have at the site incorporates objects throughout in meaningful ways for the visitor. This can be explored further in other aspects of living history museum design when trying to create successful immersive experiences.

In addition, this study highlights that these ideas of object and authenticity need not be the absolute focus. Living history museums recognize that there are other ways to engage visitors at their site that are meaningful and important besides it being authentic or by staring at objects behind barriers. These sites provide spaces for active engagement and learning and that means that authenticity in the site and its objects, as in historic simulation, is not necessarily the best way to reach visitors. In addition, findings indicate that visitor experience is in flux as visitor expectations and learning is shifting at living history museums. This research provides a different lens with which to analyze best practices for living history museum visitor experience design with a focus on immersion, storytelling, and uses of objects and look to redesign and reimagine in some ways the ways in which living history museums interpret and interact with visitors.

Implications of Study

This study illustrated some of the varied ways that living history museums use objects in creating authentic experiences, at a time when historic tourism is at a low. This research also

illuminated some important questions and discussions that come to bare about what to do moving forward. The following sections outline broader implications for the research, what questions it highlighted for the field, and how these may impact living history museums and museums moving forward.

Line between Authenticity and Comfort. This research informed an important issue facing living history museums and creating immersive experiences — the balance between authenticity and visitor comfort. Living history museum staff spoke to the ways that the institutions pride themselves on building authentic experiences down to extreme details such as breeding heritage animals or the correct colors on walls, yet they build asphalt roads and trees line the park like settings, much different from what historically would happen. Staff at Colonial Williamsburg and Greenfield Village illuminated this dichotomy during research. They spoke to how decisions are based on drawing a line in recreating an authentic experience. Staff want the experience to be authentic but visitors to be comfortable enough for them to be immersed. They mentioned, for example, that they don't want visitors to be worried about how uncomfortable the heat is in a room so they add air conditioning or trees for shade so visitors focus on the experience and stories. This relationship between authenticity and comfort highlights the issues that the museum field should consider when thinking about the complex interactions between museum goals (such as authenticity) and effects on the visitor. The discussion that is raised here in living history museums should only be the catalyst to continue conversations. While this issue was highlighted in the context of living history museums it is a broader issue of trying to balance educational and design goals with visitor comfort and entertainment. As living history museums strive toward more customizable, visitor oriented, and immersive experience, pushing forward to understand these issues within living history museums have the potential to provide meaningful

data on how museums can continue to think about and create visitor experiences and the use of objects in those spaces.

Objects Changing Role. This research highlights that objects are being used in unique and varied ways more than ever before. It uncovered an apparent shift for visitors and the design emphasis for staff at these institutions towards valuing what the objects do, instead of what they are. This is reflected in the transition from antiques to reproductions that was taking place across sites, with most emphasis at Conner Prairie and more recently Colonial Williamsburg. What drives this transition is not clear. Perhaps this is a generational change, in which different ages are expecting different things and do not value as much antiques that sit behind bars and more so hands-on experiences with objects? Do staff see differences by age and what they expect and want objects to do? Based on interviews, the differences seem more prevalent among job types and not necessarily ages. There was a lot of variation in responses by ages, but it was more similar across curatorial staff for example who express more interest in continuing to incorporate antiques. Although, this would require further research to determine if there are any significant correlations.

This trend occurring in living history museums and how the transition is taking place has implications for the broader museum field, as it grapples with the significance and role of objects in their spaces. Further research regarding this trend in museum exhibitions and programming, to valuing what objects do instead of what they are, would be important to understanding what are the important factors driving change in museums and how it impacts authentic visitor experiences. Museums broadly can learn something from the living history museum experience where objects are used in varied and unique roles in multiple contexts, and how the types of

value placed on objects in varied contexts may or may not influence the visitors experience at the site.

Impact for Museum Practitioners. This study also impacts museum practice and how museum practitioners within living history museums consider the use of their objects. It gives insight into how objects are used to create authentic experiences and the strengths and weaknesses of objects that illicit the types of immersive experiences each site hopes to achieve. As living history museums give insight into the transition from valuing objects for what they do instead or are, practitioners are being forced to reconsider how they use objects to design experience. In order to grow visitation and funds to maintain the historic structures at these sites, it is necessary to have an understanding of how their visitor experiences are designed across the variety of sites, thus sharing the multitude and variety of different ways that smaller and larger sites can leverage their objects to design experiences that meet their audiences. Making decisions will mean weighing authenticity and visitor comfort, determining what characteristics or qualities that staff can leverage to provide a visitor experience that reaches all goals for living history museums, and thinking more broadly as experience based visits become a common goal of museums across the United States. Choices regarding how and why to use objects in a variety of contexts has to potential to impact the educational goals of the institution in varied ways. This research provides insight into how living history museum practice may or may not be useful for considering exhibit design and object use more broadly for museum practitioners.

Raising Questions: Sustainability. This research, and the important conversations it has raised in valuing objects and balancing authenticity, also highlight more practical questions regarding the sustainability of these authentic experiences. These experiences are becoming increasingly more expensive, and take staff time and resources. For example, multiple staff

interviewed emphasized how reproductions cost much more than antiques now. As sites try to adapt to changing audiences, and balance the comfort of the visitor and bringing a truly authentic experience for them, adaptability may be important. The next conversation for museum practitioners then is uncovering how sites balance these issues and still maintain a sustainable model moving forward. The complexities of the visitor experience and sheer size of living history museums (both indoor and outdoor components) once again provide a valuable model for museums broadly on examining these issues. With a possible complete shift in the design of the visitor experience imminent at some sites to increase visitation, the sustainability of these experiences is a contentious point, especially if they rely on the flux of the visitors' needs and interests.

Living history museums are working to build sustainability through exploring customizable experiences. Building a strong understanding of visitor's interests, needs, and wants means that you can design more flexible and unique experiences that they cannot have anywhere else, making this transition an important point to study and follow in the museum field. The impact that these conversations can have could resonant most closely with smaller living history museums without the same resources — not only if these experiences at a smaller scale are sustainable but also how adeptly will smaller institutions be able to adapt. Living history museums provide valuable and varied models to how museums think about experience based visits moving forward and this research highlighted how some of the important issues facing the museum field broadly are undergoing drastic change in these institutions. Living history museums have the objects and structures at their disposal to tell amazing stories. While living history museums have fallen out of relevance for visitors recently, the adaptations they are making to that make history fun again are making them increasing relevant in the museum field.

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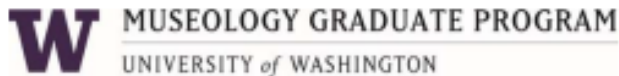
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Appendix A: Research Fact Sheet



Marina Mayne
Thesis Research Fact Sheet

Purpose of research:

The purpose of this study is to understand the role of objects in designing authentic experiences at living history museums.

Things I am hoping to learn more about:

Through this research I am hoping to learn more about how objects fit into the design of the visitor experience to living history museums. Objects are used in a variety of different ways at living history museums that are not used in other museums. This creates a unique experience for visitors to these institutions. My hope is to learn how museum professionals, from a variety of perspectives, design the visitor experience at their institution, specifically focusing on understanding how objects play a role in that design.

What does your involvement mean?

- 1-1.5 hour interview in person at your site
- Interviews will be recorded and identifying information will be used in the study, with your consent (otherwise quotes may be used but without identifying information).
- Participation is voluntary, and you can leave the study at any time.

Approximate time frame for conducting research:

- I will be traveling in Mid-March to conduct the interviews. I am anticipating being at your site on March 23rd & 24th, 2017.

Thanks very much for considering participating in this research! Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.

My contact info:

Marina Mayne

mmayne@uw.edu

734-730-1132

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Consent Script

I am asking you to participate in a research study that is part of my Master's Thesis for the University of Washington. The purpose of this study is to understand the role of objects in designing authentic experiences for visitors to living history museums. I would like to attribute your responses in the final results of this study directly to you and your institution. As such, this interview will be recorded and I may quote you in my final paper, unless otherwise requested by you. You will have a chance to review any direct references prior to publication. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits, and you may discontinue participation at any time.

Do you agree to participate in this study? Do you have any questions?

Introduction to study and thank you

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Before we begin, I would like to provide some basic background to terminology that we will be using during the study. When I refer to “objects” at your museum, I am referring to an object that is part of the simulation of an authentic historical experience. This could “[include] a prehistoric or historic artifact, work of art, book, document, etc.” It could also include reproductions, such as clothes and objects. This does not include visitor maps, benches, or interpretive labels.

The goal of this interview is to understand the role of objects in designing authentic experiences for visitors to living history museums. This interview will consist of questions in four sections: the first section is to introduce yourself, and what you do at your institution. Next we will talk about what an authentic experience is at your museum and what it looks like to you, then finally talking about where objects fit in that experience, and visitor expectation. Do not hesitate to ask any questions at any time. Thank you again for participating in this study - your insight is valuable to building a stronger understanding of designing visitor experiences and the role of objects for the future of living history museums.

INTRODUCTION

What is your name and job title?

How long have you worked at this institution?

How would you describe your job position/responsibilities at this museum?

Have you worked in any other positions at this institution?

VISITOR EXPECTATIONS

1. **What, if anything, do you think visitors expect about their visit when they come to your museum?**
 - a. Follow Up: What types of objects, if anything, do you think they expect to see?
2. What informs your understanding of your visitors' expectations?
3. **Do you design your space to fit into these visitor expectations? and How?**

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

4. **What type of visitor experience are you hoping to create?**
5. **What types of objects do you have displayed or use and How do objects fit into the visitor experience?**
6. **What characteristics of objects do you focus on when using them in the design of the visitor experience?**
 - a. How do you choose objects to be a part of the visitor experience – What characteristics or qualities are important?

Authenticity

7. **What does an “authentic visitor experience” mean to you/your museum, if anything?**
8. **What are the benefits of creating an authentic experience for your visitors? What are some of the drawbacks?**
9. **How can objects add or detract from an authentic visitor experience at your museum?**
 - a. Follow up: What are the characteristics of objects have, if anything, that helps make the experience authentic for visitors to your museum

If needed:

10. **What role, if any, do objects play in creating an authentic experience?**

Appendix C: Interview Outline



Marina Mayne

Thesis Research Study | Living History Museums

Interview Outline

Thank you for participating in this research study. The interview will last approximately one hour. We will begin with an introduction and consent language regarding the interview and recording, followed by the research topics:

Part One: Introduction

- Describe your position within the museum - what do you focus on, where else have you been involved?

Part Two: Visitor Expectations

- What do you think visitors expect about their visit when they come to your museum?

Part Three: The Visitor Experience

- What type of visitor experience are you hoping to create?
- How do objects fit into the visitor experience?
- How do you choose objects that are part of the visitor experience? What characteristics or qualities are important?

Part Four: Authenticity

- What does an authentic experience mean at your institution, if anything?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of striving toward authentic experiences?
- How can objects add or detract from an authentic experience at your museum?

This research study was approved by the IRB at the University of Washington on January, 2017. Participation is voluntary and you can leave the study at any time.

Appendix D: Coding Rubrics

Table D1

QUESTION: What, if anything, do you think visitors expect about their visit when they come to your museum?		
Code Number	Code Name	Description
1	Immersed (General)	Staff described how visitors expect to be immersed in their visit, generally. This was often explained in one of three ways, outlined below.
1.1	Immersed in Past	Staff described that visitors expect to be immersed in the past when visiting their site.
1.2	Immersed in Present	Staff described that visitors expect to be immersed in a different place, not necessarily the past, but that in this present time they could be immersed in the site and not daily life.
1.3	Immersed In Environment	Staff described that visitors expect to be immersed in the physical environment of the site, having a complete sensory experience where they can smell things, touch things, or hear things.
2	Historical Objects/Buildings (aka Authenticity)	Staff described that visitors expect historical objects and buildings when they come to their sites, including period artifacts and antiques. This was also referred to as authentic artifacts.
3	To Learn	Staff described that visitors expect to learn something when they visit, about the past, people, or how do to something.
4	Spend time with Family/Friends	Staff described that visitors expect to spend quality time with family and friends at their sites.
5	Break from reality	Staff described that visitors expect a type of break from reality, or to escape from the present when visiting their sites.
6	Open setting/Be outside	Staff described that visitors expect to be in an open, park like setting when visiting their site.
7	People to be knowledgeable	Staff described that visitors expect to encounter knowledgeable staff when visiting, particularly about the past.
8	Have fun/Entertainment	Staff described that visitors expect to be entertained when they visit their site and have fun.
9	Hands-on experience	Staff described that visitors expect a hands-on experience with objects when they visit.
10	Nostalgic experience	Staff described that some visitors expect to have a nostalgic experience when visiting the site, based on an experience they had previously at the site.

Table D2

Question: What informs your understanding of your visitor's expectations?		
Code Number	Code Name	Description
1	Being with guests	Staff say that being with guests first hand and interacting with them help inform their understandings of what visitors expect from their visits. This was broken into two categories, observations and talking to visitors.
1.1	Observations	Staff say that watching and observing guests' actions help inform their understanding of what visitors expect when they visit their site.
1.2	Talking	Staff say that talking with visitors about their experiences at the museum help inform their understandings of what visitors expect.
2	Visitor Studies/Evaluation	Staff describe that visitor studies or evaluation inform their understandings of visitors' expectations. This includes timing and tracking, surveys, interviews, and focus groups.
3	Marketing Research	Staff say that marketing research helps inform their understanding of what visitors expect by learning where they are from, how long they come for, where they are staying, etc.
4	Interpreters	Staff say that interpreters help them understand what their visitors expect by describing what they have learned from guests, watching them and talking to them.

Table D3

Question: Do you design your spaces to fit these visitor expectations - How?		
Code Number	Code Name	Description
1	Authentic artifacts	Staff say that they fit visitors' expectations by putting authentic, or antique, artifacts into the historic structures.
2	Choose Experience	Staff say that they fit visitors' expectations by allowing the visitor to design their own experience essentially, offering experiences for different visitors that fits their needs.
3	Not do what expecting	Staff say that they fit visitors' expectations by doing what they are also not expecting. They describe that by doing what they are not expecting, they surprise guests and they have fun.
4	Based in project goals	Staff say that they do what visitors expect within project goals of that exhibit and space. Therefore, they decided on a time or story, and then fit what visitors expect to learn or see within that framework.
5	Maintain step-back-in-time	Staff say that they help reach visitors expectations of being immersed in the past by maintaining that step back in time with experiences built around structures, interpreters, and doing things.
6	Design of new program/experience	Staff say that they meet visitors' expectations by design a new program or experience to fit those expectations or a program that fits what they want to learn about
6.1	Change Program (Length)	Staff say that they meet visitors' expectations by changing specifically a programs length so that visitors can move quickly through a house instead of waiting
6.2	Change how Experience a space	Staff specifically describe that they change the way a visitor experiences a space to meet some of their expectations, such as making something more hands-on, make it a tour or free walk through to meet their needs.
7	Handle More	Staff say that they meet visitors' expectations to handle more artifacts by providing more reproductions and hands on activities for kids and adults.

Table D4

Question: What type of experience are you hoping to create?		
Code Number	Code Name	Description
1	Educational	Staff describe that they are hoping to create an educational experience, where visitors learn something about the past, people that lived there, or a skill, and makes them want to ask questions.
2	Emotional	Staff describe that they want to create an emotional experience for guests at their sites, that makes them feel something and connected to the past and people.
2.1	Inspiring	Staff describe that they specifically want an emotional experience that inspires guests to think differently or about the present and what they can do and learn from the past.
3	Immersive	Staff describe that they hope to create an immersive experience, where visitors feel as though they are immersed in stories of the past.
4	Interactive	Staff describe that they hope to create an interactive experience for their visitors where they can handle or make objects and animals.
5	Relevant	Staff describe that they hope to create a relevant experience for their visitors, one that makes connections from the past to the visitor's life or present.
6	Customizable	Staff describe that they hope to create a customizable experience for their visitors. The experience offers things for each visitor to choose and do what they want.
7	Authentic	Staff describe that they hope to create an authentic experience for visitors, an experience where the visitor felt as if they in the past or a simile of the past. This term is explained in greater depth in a later question as specific definitions varied.
8	Enjoyable	Staff describe that they hope to create an experience that is fun and entertaining for their guests.

Table D5

Question: How do objects fit into the visitor experience?		
Code Number	Code Name	Description
1	Create immersive experience	Staff describe that objects help create an immersive experience, with sensory or with stories of the past.
1.1	Tell part of story	Staff describe that objects help tell part of the stories about people, the past, and the events that took place.
1.2	Engage Senses	Staff describe that objects create an immersive experience by engaging the senses, such as touch or smell.
1.3	Make things come to life	Staff describe that objects immerse the visitor in the story by making things come to life, specifically the people and past. This includes ideas such as making the past real, helping the space feel lived in, or providing a connection to the past.
2	Part of a whole	Staff describe that objects fit into the experience as a part of a whole - they cannot do things on their own but are better as a piece of the entire experience.
3	Help visitor feel inspired	Staff describe that objects help visitors feel inspired to do something in the present by helping to show people about the past, how to do things, and what it tells us about the present.
4	Inspire Curiosity	Staff describe that objects inspire curiosity in visitors about the past or stories.
5	Help Learning	Staff describe that objects help the visitor experience by helping visitors to learn ideas or think deeper.
6	Make experience meaningful	Staff describe that objects help the visitor experience by making the experience meaningful for visitors and memorable, getting visitors excited about history.
7	Spark conversations/ questions	Staff describe that objects spark conversations and questions for visitors when they are experiencing a site.
8	Comfortable entree for visitor to material	Staff describe that objects provide a comfortable medium for visitors when they don't know the material, it provides them with an easy way to start learning about the material, story or people of the past.
9	Make it authentic to time	Staff describe that objects make the space feel authentic or accurate to the time period that is being represented. It makes the space feel as if it is in a past time and place.
10	Shock visitors	Staff describe that objects shock visitors and make an experience that they perhaps were not expecting.
11	Enhance experience	Staff describe that objects enhance other parts of the experience, they are a part of a whole. They could be used as props in a performance, or help a tradesman build something.

Table D6

Question: Types of Objects at Your Site		
Code Number	Code Name	Description
1	Antiques	Staff describe antique objects, which include smaller objects that fit inside the house that are period specific artifacts, such as paper, tools, etc.
2	Food	Staff say that food and crops that they grow in gardens are important objects.
3	Animals	Staff say that animals are objects, usually specific breeds to a time period.
4	Buildings	Staff say that the buildings and structures are important objects.
5	Reproductions	Staff say that reproductions are objects used in the design of the visitor experience.
6	Technology	Staff say that technology pieces, such as video and interactives, are important objects.
7	Entire Site	Staff say that the entire site itself is an object.

Table D7

Question: How do you choose objects to be a part of the visitor experience – What characteristics or qualities are important?		
Code Number	Code Name	Description
Characteristics		
1	Authentic	Staff describe that objects should be authentic, meaning representative or of a specific time period.
2	Interactive	Staff describe that objects should be able to be held, used, and touched by visitors. Thus, they should be safe and durable.
3	Durable	Staff describe that objects should fit the context of the space, either the time period, time of year, and/or messages.
Qualities		
4	Immersive Design	Staff describe that objects should be representative of the people and time there are in the house.
4.1	Inspires	Staff describe that objects should inspire visitors in some way, such as to learn more or think differently about something.
4.2	Tell a Story	Staff describe that objects should have story attached to them or have the ability to help tell a story in the house.
4.3	Provides Connections	Staff describe that objects should help connect visitors to the stories, people, and time.
5	Trigger Action	Staff describe that objects should have the quality of triggering conversations, discussions, and prompting questions for visitors, or being used by visitors.
6	Help Teach	Staff describe that objects should have the ability to help people teach and learn about something in unique and accessible ways.
7	Fits Overall Context	Staff describe that objects should fit the entire assemblage in the room, or the larger context.

Table D8

Question: What does an "authentic visitor experience" mean to you/your museum, if anything?		
Code Number	Code Name	Description
1.1	Immersive	Staff describe that an authentic experience means an immersive experience, where the visitor is immersed in the past, in stories of the past, or in the setting of the site.
1.2	Subconscious	Staff describe that an authentic experience means an immersive experience that is subconscious for the visitor. They do not realize the details and story that they are experiencing.
2	Accurate Reflection of Past	Staff describe that an authentic experience means an accurate reflection of the past. This can take three forms illustrated below.
2.1	Simile Representation	Staff describe that an authentic experience is a simile of the past, in that it does not represent the past perfectly but is a good representation based on constraints of the present.
2.2	Has Authentic Objects	Staff describe that an authentic experience means having artifacts that are from a past time period.
3	Make Connections/Connected To	Staff describe that an authentic experience means that visitors are able to make connections to the past and the present, and feel connected to the past people or stories.
4	Step Back in Time	Staff describe that an authentic experience means that visitors feel they have stepped back in time.
5	Design Own Experience	Staff describe that an authentic experience means that visitors can design their own experiences, and design what they think an authentic experience is. If it is authentic to the visitor, then it is authentic to the museum.
6	Interactive	Staff describe that an authentic experience means that the experience is interactive between the visitor, presenter and objects about stories of the past.
6.1	Engage Senses	Staff describe that an authentic experience means the visitors senses are engaged during the experience, such as touch, smell and hearing with objects and sounds of the past.
6.2	Elicits Conversation	Staff describe that an authentic experience means one that elicits conversation between visitors, or visitors and interpreters.
6.3	Use Objects	Staff describe that an authentic experience means one that uses objects to engage visitors in ideas and stories of the past.

Table D9

QUESTION: What are the benefits of creating an authentic experience for your visitors?		
Code #	Code Name	Description
1	Immerses Visitor	Staff describe that the benefits of an authentic experience are that it immerses visitors in a time, place, story. This could even be subconscious.
2	Makes Connections	Staff describe that a benefit of an authentic experience are that it connects visitors to the past, people, their stories, and visitors own lives.
3	Increases Visitation	Staff describe that a benefit of creating an authentic experience for the institution is that it increase visitation if done correctly.
4	Rejuvenating	Staff describe that the benefits of an authentic experience are that it is rejuvenating for guests, particularly to feel like they are in a different time or place and not their own time.
5	Inspires	Staff describe that the benefit of an authentic experience is that it inspires people to think differently or learn more.
6	Knocks down Stereotypes	Staff describe that a benefit of creating an authentic experience is that it knocks down stereotypes of the past.
7	Gives institution credibility	Staff describe that a benefit of creating an authentic experience is that it increases the credibility of the institution.
8	Educational – Engaging and Hands On	Staff describe that a benefit of creating an authentic experience is that it is educational in an engaging way. Guests can be hands on with ideas through using objects.
9	Comfortable	Staff describe that a benefit of creating an authentic experience is that it is comfortable way to visit for their visitors – it is expected.
10	Customizable	Staff describe that a benefit of creating authentic experiences is that it is customizable to the guest, and can be tailored to each visitors ideas of an authentic experience.

Table D10

Question: What are some of the drawbacks of creating an authentic experience for your visitors?		
Code Number	Code Name	Description
1	Resources	Staff describe that a drawback is that an authentic experience requires a lot of resources. This is divided into time, money, and work or man power.
1.1	Money	Staff describe that a drawback is that an authentic experience requires a lot of money to build and maintain.
1.2	Time	Staff describe that a drawback is that an authentic experience requires lots of time.
1.3	Work	Staff describe that a drawback is that an authentic experience requires lots of work for staff members.
2	Object Loss	Staff describe that a drawback is that objects get lost or broken because visitors really like them during their experience or use them without care.
3	Accessibility	Staff describe that a drawback is that an authentic experience is not always accessible because you cannot alter parts of historic structures to meet ADA standards.
4	Confusing or Overwhelming to Visitor	Staff describe that a drawback is that elements of an authentic experience can be confusing or overwhelming to visitors, such as first person interpretation.
5	Create False Understanding of present	Staff describe that a drawback is that sometimes an authentic experience creates false understandings of the present, such as related to food production now and then.
6	Doesn't Reach All Audiences	Staff describe that a drawback is that the authentic experience doesn't always work for all visitors or is fun or engaging for them.
7	Hard to Keep Updated	Staff describe that a drawback is that an authentic experience is hard to keep updated when technology of other elements change frequently.
8	Detrimental to Interpreters	Staff describe that an authentic experience can be detrimental to interpreters, if visitors treat them in roles of the past that are not appropriate today (ex. Slaves).
9	Requires Compromise in Design	Staff describe a drawback of an authentic experience is that it requires compromise in design. It cannot be always 100% authentic, and modern issues require compromise in interpretation and design.
10	No Barriers vs Too Many Barriers	Staff describe that a drawback is that an authentic experience, depending on the site, can mean too many barriers for visitors or no barriers (and thus they may cross a line).

Table D11

Question: How can objects add to an authentic visitor experience at your museum?		
Code Number	Code Name	Description
1	Increase Immersion	Staff describe that objects add to an authentic experience by increasing immersion in the story, environment, or curiosity of the history presented.
1.1	Tell Part of Story	Staff describe that objects add to an authentic experience by helping to tell part of the story of a house, person, or history
1.2	Create Environment	Staff describe that objects add to an authentic experience by helping to create a historical environment that immerses the visitors in the sights, sounds, and smells of that time period.
1.3	Engage Senses	Staff describe that objects add to an authentic experience by engaging visitors' senses, such as smell and hearing the sounds of the past.
1.4	Build Curiosity	Staff describe that objects add to an authentic experience by helping build curiosity through something tangible. It can spark curiosity about how something worked or was used, as example, or can spark discussion between visitors or visitors and interpreters.
2	Assist Programming	Staff describe that objects add to an authentic experience by assisting programming, such as performances or theater.
3	Bring Content to Life	Staff describe that objects add to an authentic experience by helping bring content to life, by adding a tangible example of an idea.
4	Create Connections	Staff describe that objects add to an authentic experience by creating tangible connections to people and ideas of the past and to their own lives today.
5	Create Comfort	Staff describe that objects add to an authentic experience by making visitors comfortable in a space, and giving them something to look at or ask questions about.

Table D12

Question: How can objects detract from an authentic visitor experience at your museum?		
Code Number	Code Name	Description
	Can Disrupt Story	Staff describe that objects can detract from an authentic experience by disrupting the story. If an object is not 100% authentic or feels out of place it can disrupt the story or immersion for the visitors.
	Create False Assumptions about past/present	Staff describe that objects can detract from an authentic experience by creating false assumptions about the past or present, if the visitor does not have a frame of reference.
	Create Focus on Wrong things/Distracting	Staff describe that objects can detract from an authentic experience by distracting them from the story or main ideas, and instead they focus on small things like eating food.
	Can be Overwhelming or Confusing	Staff describe that objects can detract from an authentic experience by being overwhelming for visitors if they don't know what something is or are confused.
	Fetishize objects	Staff describe that objects can detract from an authentic experience if visitors fetishize objects, giving more value to the object than the story it tells.
	Less Hands On Experiences	Staff describe that objects can detract from an authentic experience if they are all antiques and therefore visitors can touch or handle anything and learn how it works, etc.
	Too Comfortable	Staff describe that objects can detract from an authentic experience when everything is hands on. Visitors then will touch everything including person belongings of interpreters or the few hands-off things in a room, ignoring instructions.