

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Redefining America's Eighteenth-Century Heritage Sites

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

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August 2010

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Acknowledgements

As this dissertation argues, history does not exist in a vacuum and no man stands alone. I have accomplished this work through the support of many friends, family members, and colleagues. I thank my dissertation committee for their support and advice over several years. Christine Gailey, Sharon Salinger, and Catherine Allgor have provided me with valuable insight that I could not have done without. I particularly thank Catherine Allgor, my chair, for allowing me the freedom to explore when necessary and also the structure to rein me in. Without her encouragement, unwavering belief in my work, and colorful note cards, I could not have reached this goal. Thank you to Cliff Trafzer, for bringing me to UCR as a public history MA student, and encouraging me no matter what I was doing. I have had the privilege to work with a number of public historians who have guided me in my scholarly and professional endeavors. They have provided me with insight into the field and a true passion for this work and I thank them. In particular I thank Janet Hanson, who has given me a thorough appreciation of the power of local history, memory, and community.

Thank you to the supportive families who have encouraged me throughout this journey. Thank you to my siblings, Mark, Liz, and Kara Longanbach. Thank you also to the Lindsay and McSweeney families.

Thank you to all my wonderful friends who have supported me without fail, even when they did not see me very often. In particular I thank Gil and Dolores Marikian, the Cookie Quilters, and the ABD Ladies Lunch.

Finally, I thank my husband, Brendan Lindsay. I say with truth that there is nothing better when writing a dissertation than being married to a fellow historian. Brendan has provided emotional support and technical support to this project in many ways. He encouraged many research trips, was frank with me when I needed it, and engaged in many hours of copy editing. The only words I can say are thank you and I love you from the bottom of my heart.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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University of California, Riverside, August 2010
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For over a decade historians have debated the “history wars,” discussions of difficult history and public memory that have identified problems in the American meta-narrative.

While these debates have produced fruitful academic discussion they have mainly identified problems, rather than addressing viable solutions. The solution is to alter public memory through public history that incorporates multiple historic voices and integrates geographic and regional contexts. This study analyzes interpretation at American heritage sites of the eighteenth century to consider the standard interpretive narrative and understand how alterations to narrative and interpretation can shape public memory. The heritage sites included represent the four prominent colonial regions of the eighteenth century—Chesapeake, New England, Middle, and South—and cover mainly historic house museum installations. Current interpretation of the eighteenth century by public

historians has been largely dominated by an American meta-narrative that is not multi-cultural in focus. While public history has incorporated elements of the “new social history,” most sites have not developed unified narratives that acknowledge multiple voices and influences in the shaping of American history. The history presented is largely overly localized, lacks larger historical context, and overlooks topics of difficult history such as race and slavery. Altering current narratives to include topics that were significant to the everyday life of eighteenth-century Americans has the ability to reform public memory and create a popular American history that is more textured and accurate. These proposed alterations focus on reconsidering the power of the presidency in the Early Republic, contextualizing the significance of landscape, recognizing the Atlantic context, reforming depictions of slavery, and developing better concepts of the reality of life in the period. The creation of new and more challenging narratives at heritage sites has the potential to dramatically alter American public memory.

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Introduction

The “culture wars” arguments about the political, creative, and economic factors that control American culture began in the 1960s and continued through the 1990s. These arguments morphed into the “history wars,” discussions on the nature and development of American memory. The “history wars” began in the mid 1990s with the *Enola Gay* exhibition. The *Enola Gay*, to be exhibited at the National Air and Space Museum, was a centerpiece of a larger exhibit that encouraged Americans to question their past and popular historical memory. The *Enola Gay* exhibit was controversial; it displayed the outcomes of the atomic bombs that ended the war in the Pacific theater of World War II. While Americans were comfortable considering the bombs as the necessary ending of the war and an answer to the Japanese aggressor, the interpreters at the Smithsonian were asking Americans to think again. With disturbing photographs and artifacts the curators at the Smithsonian were encouraging real consideration of difficult history. The loss of life, disfigurement, and radioactive legacy of the atomic bombs were more than Americans were ready for. The exhibit was closed. Americans were not prepared for this challenge to public memory.

From this point, the “history wars” began to consider the place of historians in the construction of memory. In the 21st century the “history wars” argument has developed and changed. No longer concerned only with the nature of American memory, or who to blame for its deficiencies, public history has become a new battle ground. New generations of historians are using the example of the *Enola Gay*, an exhibit which had been developed by public historians, to explore presentation of difficult history in

classrooms and historic sites. These historians, such as James Oliver Horton and Gary Nash, seek revision to memory and encourage acknowledgement of difficult history in order to inspire Americans to understand the truth of their history and to recognize many diverse historical actors. However, while demanding these alterations in memory, and frequently understanding the place of heritage tourism in the formation of memory, few of these historians are suggesting real-world models for alteration of memory. The potential for sweeping and realistic change lies with the work of public historians.¹

Public historians must acknowledge and understand their role in shaping public memory. This memory takes a number of forms, civic, social, and economic. Because many Americans frequently turn to museums and historic sites for their history rather than to print sources, the work of public memory falls to public historians in many fields. Consequently, public historians must create narratives that shape this public memory responsibly, seeking truth rather than a more pleasant fiction. Visitors are not served by narratives that create false positives or refuse to acknowledge failings. If anything, Americans must be in the habit of questioning their past and understanding that American history is full of strife, difficulty, and decisions and actions that are morally questionable.

¹ A concise narrative of the “culture wars” can be found in Richard Jensen, “The Culture Wars, 1965-1995: A Historian’s Map,” *Journal of Social History* 29, Special Issue: Social History and the American Political Climate: Problems and Strategies (1995): 17-37. For more information on the “history wars,” see: Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, ed., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996); and Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, ed., *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past*, Vintage Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 2000).

By understanding the true nature of their past Americans can become better equipped to understand their place within their nation and identify the challenges in their present.²

The method needed to come to this new public memory, one that reforms the dominant meta-narrative and presents difficult history, is through a new emphasis on interpreting everyday life at historic sites. Everyday life has existed in one form or another in museum interpretation for generations. However, the portrayal of everyday life and its utility in making larger connections has not always been effective. Highlighting everyday life in interpretation is the key to unlocking the struggle of difficult history, the answer to the “history wars” debate, and the method by which public memory can be altered by public historians.

Public historians focus too much on the significant single events and prominent persons that inhabited their sites, which creates the same type of history found in elementary school textbooks. These focal points are also frequently uniformly positive. While the “culture wars” and the work done by Gary Nash and Eric Foner, among others, has attempted to remedy this problem in textbooks and classrooms by infusing them with a greater multicultural ethic, this is not a viable solution for changing public memory.³ Public memory is formed in childhood, but reinforced in adulthood through the heritage tourism experience. It is the responsibility of those who oversee heritage tourism to

² For more information on public memory, see: Roy Rosenweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); and Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

³ Eric Foner, *The New American History: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); and Gary Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early North America*, Fourth Edition (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000).

challenge this public memory and change its narrative. The current narrative at many heritage locations is one that focuses on independent key events and persons rather than a broader context, and glosses over the significance of everyday life. Americans have a difficult time understanding the past because they see it as a separate experience—one in another reality—that is largely inaccessible. Important moments lose significance when taken out of the context of everyday life. However, when significant historical events occur, such as the Revolution, and they are put in the context of everyday life, they become more tangible and accessible to the public. Such a strategy allows one to insert oneself into history. Public historians must understand and embrace the importance of the everyday in creating narrative. The consistency of everyday life tells the true history, and guests will have an easier time accessing history when they can see the way all the individual pieces of history—artifacts, legislation, architecture, and economics—worked together to create a workable life. It is through this understanding that historic sites will be able to make their larger points and have a chance at really informing visitors in a lasting manner.

Everyday life has great power because the details of seemingly mundane existence have tangible meaning for guests. While the ways of everyday life have changed over time, the goals, triumphs, and challenges of life have changed little. The day to day needs of survival, the desire to create and maintain a comfortable home, to celebrate weddings and births, and come together at funerals, these have been and remain constants. These elements of everyday life speak volumes when portrayed within the historical experience. While these concerns may seem insignificant when compared with

other historical events—like battles or elections—it is the alteration in everyday life that signifies real historical change. But most Americans do not consider history in terms of everyday life. They typically understand history as a series of events that existed in a chronological sequence. However, it is because of the power of everyday life that historic house museums are so popular. There is an active desire for historical understanding among guests that few sources can satisfy as well as a historic house. Viewing the flow of time in a manner that echoes modern everyday existence inspires a new perspective with which to understand history. This makes the everyday a powerful historical tool. It can make connections to the past more tangible and lasting than a focus on significant single events.

.Everyday life is even more significant when considering the eighteenth century, in particular. For Americans the eighteenth century is far distant. There are no living human representations of that time remaining. It is not within the memory of grandparents or great-grandparents and it lacks vivid depiction in the form of photographs, recorded audio, or video. In essence, because it is such a distant time it lacks reality. The history that occurred in the eighteenth century is part of a larger flow of time. While it had great meaning to the formation of America it has little meaning for everyday Americans. Creating a realistic interpretation of the eighteenth century that portrays everyday life will close this gap for guests. By creating significant analogies to the common experience of the eighteenth-century everyday, present-day Americans will not only understand the narrative at a deeper level, it will also change the way they view

the distant past and thereby cause a re-evaluation in their understanding of American history.

It is with these two themes—the formation of public memory and the importance of the everyday—in mind that I have conducted this research. This study is based largely on experiential data. Over a three-year period I visited numerous heritage locations from the eighteenth-century British Atlantic colonies. The study was narrowed to four colonies that were deemed representative of the four colonial regions. Virginia in the Chesapeake, Massachusetts in New England, Pennsylvania in the Middle Colonies, and South Carolina in the Southern colonial region. Within each former colony representative eighteenth-century locations were selected. In Virginia, Richmond and Williamsburg, the James River, and the presidential homes of Monticello and Mount Vernon were deemed the most significant to the eighteenth century. For Massachusetts, Boston, Salem, and Quincy, the home of John and Abigail Adams, composed the study. In Pennsylvania, the eighteenth century was found in Philadelphia and Germantown and along the banks of the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers. In South Carolina the Ashley River and Charleston were the focus of the study. In each location visits were made to heritage sites of many varieties, but historic house museums and living history installations were the predominant subjects. Each visit was undertaken as a tourist observer. Docents and fellow tour participants were not informed of the research being conducted in order to ensure that the data reflected the typical experience of the heritage tourist. Archival research was also conducted in each area in order to interact with the everyday life of the historical actors in these locations. This study takes the heritage tourist experience as it

currently exists and challenges interpreters to make the changes necessary to convey everyday life and create real and meaningful alterations to public memory.

In chapter one, the work of public memory is challenged in the presentation of locations of power. In the American Republic, ultimate power is vested in the hands of the president. The work of public memory done at presidential sites is significant to the overall heritage experience of many Americans. Visitors who might not visit other heritage sites, even those in their own region, are more likely to visit presidential sites such as Mount Vernon or Monticello. It is the challenge of interpreters at these sites to ensure that guests experience not just the life of the presidents, but come to an understanding of the true nature of power as envisioned by the eighteenth-century presidents.

Chapter two explores the need for expansion of historical context to incorporate natural landscape features at heritage sites. Specifically, the Atlantic context and the significance of rivers to eighteenth-century America should be developed as significant and interpreted aspects of the heritage tourism experience. The landscape was an important aspect of the everyday life of Americans no matter their station, a fact that most heritage tourists are ignorant of. The landscape does not currently hold a prominent position in American popular memory, an artificial condition that must be changed.

The historic house museum, the essential tool of the public historian in conveying the everyday experience of historical actors and altering public memory, is the subject of the third chapter. Interpretation at historic house museums has fallen dramatically behind modern scholarship and has lost focus. No longer fully focused on creating new

narratives, most historic residences seek to reinforce popular memory and continue older white male power narratives. This interpretation is flawed and fails to take advantage of the strength of the medium to produce interaction with the greater themes of everyday life in the eighteenth century.

In chapter four, the urban landscape is developed as a challenging but significant location for the creation of important new narratives. Everyday life in the urban center occurred not just in residences and businesses, but in the streets and gardens. These frequently uninterpreted sectors of the cityscape must be opened up through innovative methods to develop narratives that change perceptions of urban history. Streets and gardens are not considered in public memory beyond the superficial concerns of transportation and beauty. However, they can tell larger and more textured stories about the functioning of urban life and illustrate greater ideas of community in the eighteenth century.

Finally, chapter five considers one of the most challenging topics in public history currently, the issue of slavery. Slavery was an inescapable aspect of everyday life in the eighteenth century in every colony and state. Nonetheless, popular memory has positioned slavery as a topic that is difficult to consider and southern in nature, a perception that must be altered. This alteration in public memory can only be achieved by public historians who seek to perform the truly challenging work of difficult history. The creation of a unified narrative, that considers all historical actors as equally responsible for the formation of America is necessary in order for meaningful change to occur. The

persistence of separate narratives and special topics approaches can no longer be deemed appropriate or acceptable in interpretation.

Throughout the study I wish to convey only a proactive approach to the creation of positive and meaningful change in public history and heritage tourism. An investment in heritage tourism is an investment in the future of America in the form of public memory. It is in this vein that I begin the study with the Jeremiah Lee Mansion in Marblehead, Massachusetts, an eighteenth-century home with tremendous untapped potential. On my visit to the Lee Mansion in early fall of 2009, I was given a tour by an older and long-serving docent from the Marblehead Historical Society. As we entered the residence she stopped me and very seriously told me that while George Washington had visited the residence, I should understand that he never did sleep there. It was a moment that inspired great perspective. This study proposes a complete change in the way public historians conceive of the historical narrative and shape public memory. It proposes new methods of interpretation and understanding to make greater connections with the American public and convey the best and most accurate history possible. A history that does not rest solely on names or dates to form meaning, but creates a sense of the effusive nature of the historical narrative for all that encounter it as its goal. However, as these changes occur, let us not lose sight of the docent from the Marblehead Historical Society, because without her diligent work and passion for American history, and that of others like her, there would be no foundation on which to build.

Chapter 1: Civic Memory: The Problem of the Presidents

For many Americans, much of their history is defined by power and its pursuit. From their earliest instruction in history many children have learned about the American desire to have the power to shape their nation independent of outside pressures. For modern residents of the American Republic power means leadership and the ability to bring about significant changes that have wide ranging impacts on the populace. This power can exist politically at the hands of presidents and congressmen, economically in the form of business, or socially in the hands of reformers or the people themselves. The accumulation of power—political, economic, or social—is an idea that is irresistible to Americans. Because the United States is a republic, power is commonly understood as accessible but not always achievable. Historically, Americans have been attracted to locations of power within their society. Power rests with the populace to select their representatives on many levels, which creates a great amount of interest in those that this power is vested in, past or present.

Current preoccupation with powerful individuals takes a number of forms, from public policy and religious affiliation to private matters of personality and family. Americans are curious about powerful individuals, where this power comes from, and how these individuals differ from themselves. Since the nineteenth century, Americans have had a regard for political leaders that represent the “common man,” but have also consistently elected men who are uncommon in education and experience. American tourists to historic sites seek to explore the paradoxical ideas that make up the national consciousness, that the leaders of the people be “of the people,” and yet set at a level

above the people at the same time. This exploration leads them to the roots of the American political system and to the homes of the early presidents.

The homes of powerful eighteenth-century men and their families are among the most popular of American heritage tourism destinations. In addition to the usual desire by visitors to see how people lived in other times and to learn about history, Americans that visit the homes of the powerful seek to understand the accumulation and manifestation of power within their society. Interpretation at the homes of powerful Americans is significant in the development of public memory and American identity. The residences of George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson, as a grouping of heritage tourism sites present a compelling argument on the meaning of power in a republic. However, taken individually, none presents an adequately balanced interpretation appropriate to understanding each man or the Early Republic.

Eighteenth-century American leaders are of special interest to heritage tourists because they represent the founding generation. The men of this period in the minds of visitors were instrumental in the creation of the nation they inhabit today. While many hold these men in high esteem, there is also a fascination with their personal lives and failings in order to make them more accessible and understandable. The ideas of the revolutionaries and founders, the way they lived their lives, and why they created the nation they did, are common lines of inquiry for even casual heritage tourists. As a result, many Americans that have not made a habit of visiting heritage tourism sites still may have made the modern pilgrimage to sites such as Mount Vernon and Monticello. They take this journey to see themselves in the founders and to come closer to the principles

the nation was founded on. Here modern Americans can evaluate their own place in American society and answer some of the questions they have about these men and the power they attained. Their ability to attain these answers is determined by the interpretive plan in place at heritage sites and the priorities of interpreters in their arguments.

As separate sites that have developed independent interpretive foci, the message currently conveyed at presidential homes is not consistent in message. However, considered collectively, they provide a good picture of the early American statesman. Visitors are provided with a number of different interpretations of these men and their lives while interacting with their personal dwellings, families, and material possessions. At Mount Vernon, guests are encouraged to see Washington as a powerful military leader, a great president, a great man, and an excellent manager. At Monticello, guests are presented with a man who was highly intellectual, eccentric, and also a sometimes ineffective plantation manager. Guests to the Adamses Old Farm at Peacefield are presented with a political family grounded by a strong marriage and successful parenting, producing many generations of statesmen. However, in all three cases, presidential and political achievements are not the focus of the homes themselves. They are mentioned when needed, or displayed in a gallery, but the homes of the presidents work to convey everyday life for those of power. In some cases, interpreters encourage an appreciation of opulence and difference, and, in others simplicity and commonality. This portrayal of the daily life of the early Presidents makes these figures more accessible to guests and creates opportunities for comparison and inquiry. Put together, Americans are encouraged to comprehend that the founders were common men who worked hard and managed their

lives and fortunes successfully, through education and ambition they rose to prominence, only to later retire happily to the homes they always adored. Visitors learn that power could and can come to anyone and that the American dream, no matter how nebulous a concept, might be attained through hard work, dedication, and an independent spirit. Regrettably, interpretations are less likely to delve into the complications that arise in this pursuit.

The unfortunate misstep at these sites is their great desire to display the power of these men with a reluctance to admit to failures, the importance of supporting characters, or the real nature of American democracy at the turn of the nineteenth century. These elements are significant because they not only give the public the ability to see their honored historical figures as ordinary people with the same character attributes as themselves, but they have an opportunity to understand that just as today, no man is an island. There are parallels to be drawn between ordinary existence in the eighteenth century and modern existence. Some guests come to historic sites expressly to experience these parallels between their modern existence and the history they are familiar with. Guest seek comparison to their own lives, the difference caused by hundreds of years, and an understanding of the evolution of everyday life, because grasping these concepts will give them a better glimpse of the evolution of the nation, and the evolution of their place within it.

Part of creating an effective connection with guests at presidential sites should be the acknowledgement of flaws within historical actors. Visitors actively seek missteps and moral shortcomings as a way to bring the founders to a more accessible level. They

need failure to understand these giants of popular memory as human beings and to see that power can come to the flawed. While failures and missteps are acknowledged at presidential homes, it is often quietly and sometimes only in response to direct questioning. The public wants to see the shortcomings of their presidents and leaders. This is necessary in a society where leadership falls to representatives who are themselves “of the people.” In this way, American leaders will always be flawed because it is in their nature to be so. Those who seek to learn about the history of the Early Republic want to understand these men who created their government. They want to understand who these men were and what made them special. While historians may argue about the true nature of the founders academically, laymen seek the truth about these men at their homes, because glimpsing the everyday life of these larger than life figures gives a glimpse of their true character. What visitors want to know is, were these actually real people? Did they have the same types of challenges and problems that we have today? Were they infallible? While presidential failures should by no means represent the bulk of the narrative at these sites, they should be more readily evident as guests will be better served by a history that accurately presents eighteenth and early-nineteenth century leaders as individuals equally capable of good leadership and poor decisions. The founders as they exist in history textbooks, where most Americans get their basic history, are largely two dimensional figures. The public at heritage sites seek to fill out this basic explanation and come to a three-dimensional understanding. This is most easily accomplished at residential properties where guests can interact with the everyday lives

of the founders and understand how they dealt with challenges from the mundane to the significant.

There is also a tendency at the modern heritage site to downplay the influence of other individuals in the life or success of the president. While supporting historical actors such as wives, children, employees, and servants are evident at presidential homes, their true impact on the celebrated man or his career is not always readily presented.

Representation of these ancillary persons at presidential homes is significant because it provides more accurate and integrated history. Visitors must come to understand that history does not occur independently of outside factors and influences. This is especially true when considering eighteenth-century locations of power. John Adams could not have operated independently of his wife Abigail. Thomas Jefferson had the support of his daughters and their families and a home maintained by slave labor. Washington was able to accomplish much in his life because he had an excellent support system at Mount Vernon composed of his wife, Martha, her children and grandchildren, and a large number of hired employees and enslaved workers. This is to say nothing of the extensive community correspondence networks that existed in eighteenth-century America. The founders existed within a larger community of ancillary voices that provided support and encouragement, a fact that many guests are ignorant of.

Finally, visitors are not acquainted with the truth of the American electoral system that produced these leaders. The electoral system that developed from the Constitutional Convention was meant to keep true decision making in elections as indirect as possible. Universal suffrage was not a part of the Early American republic, a fact with which not

all visitors are acquainted. Americans visiting present historic sites come with the impression that the franchise was as it exists today and most historic sites do little to disabuse visitors of this notion. Interpreters must present the fact that these men were elected more by their peers than by “the people,” in order to increase overall understanding of the method by which power was obtained by their subject.

Visitors to presidential homes, perhaps more than any other type of heritage location, come with a set of expectations. These expectations cover not just ideas about who the president was and the bits of information they can remember from school, they also expect to be awed. They want to know the man, feel the power, understand the authority, and interact with a clear narrative about the historical significance of this figure. Many guests have a disjointed existing knowledge about the subject and seek a narrative that will create meaning from the chaos of historical understanding they have obtained from long distant years of instruction. For example, in the case of George Washington guests come with ideas about a general, the first president, possibly a slave holder, the cherry tree and an inability to tell lies. These types of historical associations are present at all presidential sites and create the core of initial historical inquiry for guests. This creates a challenge for public historians, who must relate a balanced narrative that places proper emphasis and creates interaction and meaning within the site while at the same time answering these questions.

Public historians working at presidential homes are presented with issues that are not evident in other locations. In addition to the usual concerns of resource managers at historic sites these planners must also consider how to develop a concise message and

effective tour while accommodating tremendous crowds. Interpreters at these sites may seem to have an easy task at first glance; they are dealing with historical actors that are well known. Interpreters at other types of sites must develop the historical significance of their site and establish the importance of the site to create impact and awareness for guests, while presidential interpreters develop experiences for guests who have come because of known significance. While public memory as it relates to the founding and the legacy of the early presidents is very strong and has been cultivated over many generations, this benefit comes with some challenges, too. Interpreters at these sites have the difficult task of editing the lives of great Americans to inform effectively, but they also have the ability to alter public memory. When guests leave these locations, the goal for public historians must be clear comprehension of a narrative that addresses identity, power, and history. These goals are significant because the early presidents were great men within their communities and influential historical actors in their period independent of their roles as executive leaders. Eighteenth and early-nineteenth century statesmen were founders of what was to come and what still exists and visitors seek an understanding of this connection.

The process of editing the very full and eventful lives of these men, especially where there is an insatiable public thirst for information, is daunting. However, this process is necessary when the goal is creating a narrative that is accessible to a broad public. A historic site is not just the location for the recitation of a biography. Just as at any other heritage location, the presidential historic site must provide a thesis and supporting evidence to inform guests while encouraging inquiry and comprehension. A

narrative must be developed that acknowledges a productive and influential life, one that brings guests gradually into interacting with key points. The residences of Thomas Jefferson and George Washington have developed interpretive centers to work toward this goal, providing the substantial biographical information that guests crave, while utilizing the residence and grounds to make a larger argument.

Monticello, the residence of Thomas Jefferson in Charlottesville, Virginia, is a popular site for heritage tourism. As with many presidential sites, Monticello welcomes hundreds of thousands of guests every year and is challenged, as are many other crowded and popular heritage sites, to create interpretive programs that both present concise arguments and keep crowds moving and engaged. The recent construction of the interpretive center and the encouragement of guests to explore aspects of the grounds at their own pace contributes to the success of this program. In addition to the onsite programs, Monticello maintains an excellent website that provides a multifaceted experience. The website is especially effective as an introduction to the site for guests before they arrive, or to answer lingering questions after their visit, or to provide an experience for those who can not make the trip. The virtual tour element provides a tour that is remarkably similar to the physical tour and remains true to interpretive goals. As a complete experience, Monticello's interpreters present Thomas Jefferson as a powerful individual who lived a remarkable life and through a lifetime of learning and duty to the nation, became one of its greatest leaders.⁴

⁴The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, "The Monticello Explorer," The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, <http://explorer.monticello.org/index.html> (accessed February 3, 2010).

The experience at Monticello is perhaps most successful because it concerns Jefferson-the-man more prominently than Jefferson-the-statesman-or-founder. This was his home and as such it is interpreted through his private life. Information on Jefferson's political career and his many achievements is available in the visitor's center museum through a number of well-crafted exhibits that appeal to a range of ages and interests. However, once guests embark on their tour of the grounds and original structures, the focus changes to Jefferson in a domestic context. This is not to suggest that curators and interpreters ever lose sight of the distinguished nature of Jefferson or his accomplishments as a statesman. Jefferson's eminence as a founder is subtly evident throughout. The most evident moment of Jefferson's greatness is at the very beginning of the residence tour in the hall, where artifacts of Jefferson's presidency are on display. Docents make the hall a transition space for guests to confront their political ideas and at once leave them behind as they enter into the personal life of the founder. These ideas are echoed in the official guide to Monticello which emphasizes the residence, grounds, and plantation aspects of the site over any political concerns.⁵

During the residence tour guests are introduced to select members of the Jefferson family and the way they interacted with the residence, an effective method for the introduction of ancillary voices. The functionality of the structure, the purpose behind its design and construction, and what it meant to the president are all significant issues explored throughout the tour. At the same time guests are given visual clues through artifacts to encourage them in envisioning the residence as the home of a real person

⁵Susan R. Stein, Peter J. Hatch, Lucia C. Stanton, and Merrill D. Peterson, *Monticello: A Guidebook* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2008).

rather than a character in a history book. The bookroom, cabinet, and bedroom all contribute to the overall theme of Jefferson as not just a real person, but one with many ideas and interests. Thomas Jefferson is interpreted at Monticello as a brilliant man, an inventor, a renaissance man, endlessly practical, and full of the most elementary common sense. Interpreters show him as a man who loved learning, devoted to his family and friends, diligent in the management of the plantation, and proud of his country. Guests to Monticello interact with the root of Jeffersonian power, too. They learn that the acquisition and maintenance of power is dependent upon knowledge and a lifetime of learning.

The tour at Monticello also hints at the many contradictions that historians such as Joseph J. Ellis have identified within Jefferson.⁶ The struggles of Jefferson to reconcile contradictions in ideology as well as his ineffective management of the Monticello plantation are developed by culling information from the main residence tour, the self guided experience in the dependencies, and the specific tours of locations such as Mulberry Row. Guests struggle to understand how a man so dedicated to principles of freedom, natural rights, and liberty could keep many slaves. They also wonder how such a grand plantation, with such an intelligent man at its head, could be unprofitable. These contradictions within the life of Jefferson are explored by docents who attempt to

⁶ For recent biographical analysis of Jefferson, see: Richard B. Bernstein, *Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Noble E. Cunningham, Jr. *In Pursuit of Reason: The Life of Thomas Jefferson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time*, 6 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1948-1981); Alf Johnson Mapp, *Thomas Jefferson: A Strange Case of Mistaken Identity* (New York: Madison Books, 1987); Jack McLaughlin, *Jefferson and Monticello: The Biography of a Builder* (New York: Henry Holt, 1988); Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson: A Reference Biography*. (New York: Scribner, 1986); and Willard Sterne Randall, *Thomas Jefferson: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993).

integrate these problems into the overall narrative while still establishing Jefferson as a great man with unmatched accomplishments. Visitors come away with the sense that the Jefferson they thought they knew was in fact endlessly more complicated than they imagined. The acknowledgement of this complication represents the success of interpreters at the site, who have created a narrative that does not overly generalize and simplify complex ideas but instead encourages thought and inquiry. This moment allows visitors to engage with the work of historians and to understand that history is never simple or shallow in nature. There is a sense at Monticello that there are tremendous depths that have not been plumbed on the tour, but await exploration, inspiring inquiry after the visit is completed.

Guests to Monticello have expectations that are quite mixed. They have learned about Thomas Jefferson as a prominent figure of American history for their entire lives, perhaps not completely understanding the reason for his importance. However, recent scholarship and popular history has added the name “Sally Hemings” to their collection of Jefferson ideas. While the Jefferson/Hemings story has not overshadowed Jefferson’s legacy, it does loom large in the minds of guests, and they seek fulfillment of their curiosity in their visit. The Monticello experience has been designed to answer all types of inquiry. The curators at Monticello have created an overall experience that dovetails well with the very ideals that Jefferson himself prized. Throughout the visitor’s center, the plantation house and outbuildings, Mulberry Row, the cemetery, and even the gift shops, guests at Monticello are encouraged to explore, learn, question, and continue these pursuits after they leave the grounds. Questions on the Monticello grounds with regard to

the Jefferson/Hemming story are openly answered by docents, but discussion of the topic is not typically initiated by staff.

If guests are seeking at Monticello a discussion of flaws, an acknowledgement of questionable behavior, or a lurid scandal, they will not be fully satisfied. However, docents and curators at Monticello do seek to respond to the questions of the public and never appear to be steering guests away from uncomfortable questions. Docents openly admit that Jefferson was not always the best plantation manager and was often away. He died in tremendous debt and all his belongings were auctioned off, including all of the slaves. He is openly interpreted as a slaveholder. The slave context is not hidden on this Virginia plantation. The story of the Hemingses is part of the story of Monticello and is presented in part within the residence, in part during the self-guided tour of the dependencies, and finally in part on the tour of Mulberry Row. Guests can find books such as Annette Gordon-Reed's *The Hemingses of Monticello* in the bookstore.⁷ There is no attempt to hide Sally Hemings at Monticello. Nor is there an overt attempt to make the Jefferson/Hemings story the predominant narrative, evidence of the great efforts taken at Monticello to achieve balance in the narrative. However, discussions of recent DNA evidence in the Jefferson/Hemings case point to careful censorship of more delicate questions.⁸

⁷ Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).

⁸ The idea that the residence tour must create a narrative embracing balance was put forward just after announcement of the DNA connection of the Jefferson line and the Hemings line by a number of scholars of Jefferson and the Early Republic. The implications of these findings, their impact, and the Jeffersonian legacy is explored in Joseph J. Ellis, "Jefferson: Post DNA," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 57, no. 1 (January 2000): 125 – 138. Docents at Monticello argue that the DNA evidence, while

The lingering questions that guests depart Monticello with relate to connections. While docents do an effective job of transitioning guests at the beginning of the residence tour from politics to domestic life, they do not work in the opposite direction. By the end of the home tour it is sometimes difficult to make connections between Jefferson-the-man and Jefferson-the-president. The best connection that can be made to help guests to understand how this educated and engaging man became involved in American politics is through Jefferson's passion. Jefferson can be understood throughout the tour, the museum, the interpretive film, and while walking the grounds, to be a highly passionate individual. Indeed, someone who sought mastery of any interest and had great passion for all pursuits that he felt valuable. The revolutionary struggle and later the formation of the American nation were pursuits that he felt were essential for progress and so he participated in them with great passion. A greater connection for guests would be to assist them in understanding Jefferson's dedication to the study of law, the Enlightenment, his unwavering belief in human rights, and dedication to the constitutional experiment.

Connections are more easily made in the museum at the visitor's center of Monticello, which seeks to connect to the domestic focus of the residence tour to the political and public Jefferson in a meaningful way. Guests begin and end their interaction with Monticello in this space, which serves as a gateway to the residence and grounds.

indisputable, could point to any of several Jefferson men residing at Monticello at different times during the period in question and does not directly implicate Thomas Jefferson himself. For more on the scholarly debate surrounding Thomas Jefferson and connection to the Hemings family, see: Michael Durey, *With the Hammer of Truth: James Thomson Callender and America's early National Heroes* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1990); Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1997); Jon Kukla, *Mr. Jefferson's Women* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007); Jan Ellen Lewis and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *Sally Hemings & Thomas Jefferson: History, Memory, and Civic Culture* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1999); and Clarence Earl Walker, *Mongrel Nation: The American Begotten by Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 2009).

Visitors waiting for a shuttle, or just returning, are encouraged to explore the museum. The exhibits at the museum are meant to dovetail with the residence and key aspects of Jefferson's life with which visitors may already have some familiarity. Interests that are developed at the residence can be further explored at the museum. Guests interested in architecture and the construction of the residence, for example, will find an exhibit displaying his drafting table, tools, and measured drawings. In the same way, furniture, education, music, and other subjects are presented to guests whose interest has been piqued by the residence tour. The placement of the museum allows guests to continue in their new pursuit by engaging with artifacts and exhibit labels. In addition to artifacts, intellectual ideas and many of the influences upon Jefferson are discussed in the interpretive center, filling in some of the blanks that guests may have remaining after the tour.

While the Monticello tour is balanced, interesting, and presents good history, one must wonder how Jefferson himself would understand it. Jefferson, as did Adams and other founders, considered his legacy at the end of his life. The inscription on his tombstone, which he himself authored, is telling: "Here was buried Thomas Jefferson Author of the Declaration of Independence of the Statue of Virginia for religious freedom & Father of the University of Virginia. because by these testimonials that I have lived, I wish most to be remembered."⁹ These are not the moments at Monticello for which Jefferson is most remembered. In fact, this epitaph is not typically mentioned in the

⁹ Quoted in Stein, Hatch, Stanton, and Peterson, 115. Jefferson's epitaph is further addressed by Ronald Hatzenbuehler, "Growing Weary in Well-Doing: Thomas Jefferson's Life among the Virginia Gentry," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 101, no. 1 (January 1993): 5-36.

residence tour. While it is not essential to explore Jefferson's home based on his desired legacy, the elements of his life that he found most valuable are left for guests to explore on their own, without the aid of trained docents. Jefferson did not wish his legacy to be tied up in slaves, plantations, or decorative arts, but civic works that represented his most cherished ideals. At the end of the Monticello experience, where is this civic pride?

An exploration of the ideas that Jefferson presented in his epitaph provide an important moment to shape civic memory for the public. Jefferson's epitaph speaks to all Americans and sends a message about what this founder, and indeed numerous founders, found to be the most important elements for the citizenry. The epitaph is clear, Jefferson wished to be remembered for his civic works and those that he selected are telling. The Declaration of Independence, asserted the independence of the new nation, but that also proclaimed the fundamental rights of man and their worthiness of protection. The Statue of the State of Virginia for Religious Freedom encouraged Americans in the separation of church and state and the understanding that a disinterested nature is best for the republic. The founding of the University of Virginia amounted to the founding of an institution dedicated to creating a community of educated citizens prepared to follow in the footsteps of the founders and Jefferson himself. As a man, Jefferson found his most significant accomplishments in the protection of rights, duty to the republic, and the creation of future citizens, cast in a mold similar to his, to carry on the legacy of the founding. These ideals can provide valuable insight into Jefferson's character for guests to Monticello.

The concepts introduced in the epitaph could easily be integrated into the existing residence tour. Docents typically speak with tour groups on the portico at Monticello before stepping into the residence. The epitaph can be mentioned here, before guests step through the doors. Visitors can be encouraged to look for these three elements within the residence. Evidence of Jefferson's civic duty is displayed throughout the residence from the Native American artifacts collected during his presidency, to the many volumes within the library, to the proximity of the university to the residence. Guests can be encouraged by the end of the tour to understand why Jefferson found these elements of his life to be the most significant. Jefferson loved his country, as a founder, as a president, as a citizen. Power then for Jefferson might be interpreted as the ability to live a life free from outside pressure, to revel in self-government, and to have the ability to develop policies to ensure the freedom of others. Access to power and leadership, for Jefferson, was tied up in civic duty. However, access to this civic duty in the Early Republic, was dictated by education and wealth. Creating connections between civic duty, education, and power would develop a more accurate and challenging narrative at Monticello.

Mount Vernon presents a starkly different picture of power and the founders for guests than that presented at Monticello. The home of George Washington, with its new interpretive center and tour program, presents an image of a man with tremendous power and influence and no evident flaws. The atmosphere at Mount Vernon is that of a shrine, complete with stained glass murals of Washington's life, hallowed ground for Americans seeking connection to the nation's beginnings. The interpretive center includes an

introductory film on Washington's life, and when paired with guided tours they paint a picture of a great man who managed his personal and political life exceptionally well. This was a man of power worthy of his place in American history. It is almost as if interpreters are working to make the man fit the image, rather than reliably discussing the man himself. Washington is presented as a great Virginian, an effective plantation manager, a great military leader, and a flawless early American.¹⁰

However, the flawless character presented at Mount Vernon obscures several of Washington's very obvious flaws. These are ignored, explained away, or downplayed for guests. While Monticello can be said to focus on assisting Americans in knowing Jefferson as a person, Mount Vernon does not give the same effect. Visitors to Mount Vernon are not necessarily encouraged to understand the private Washington, rather they are taught to respect him for the great man that he was. Presentation of flaws should not be the most significant aspect of interpretation at any site. But, the omission of the flawed character of historical actors, including presidents, gives an artificial character to the narrative and obscures historical understanding for guests.

Presenting historical figures, particularly those of power, without flaws creates an inaccurate historical narrative. It similarly reveals important inconsistencies with regard

¹⁰ For a biographical analysis of Washington, see: John R. Alden, *George Washington: A Biography* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1984); Richard E. Brookhiser, *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency George Washington* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004); John E. Ferling, *The Ascent of George Washington: The Hidden Political Genius of an American Icon* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009); John E. Ferling, *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988); Paul Johnson, *George Washington: The Founding Father* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005); Robert F. Jones, *George Washington: Ordinary Man, Extraordinary Leader* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Willard Sterne Randall, *George Washington: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1997).

to the way power is perceived in America. In a nation that was founded on the work of human beings, where government was created to account for humanity's inevitable fallibility, power must rest by design with someone who is not perfect. However, interpretation of the early presidents focuses not on imperfections but perfections in their character. While the reinforcement of the positive qualities of the individual is significant in explaining the fact that power was vested in them, it is also significant to understand the negative. The acknowledgement of the negative assists in the appreciation of decisions made, the manner in which power was managed, and the special quality of the American republic that embraces this dynamic. Interpreters should not fear the true representation of this dynamic. If the purpose of heritage tourism is to educate guests on their history and their present, then locations of power present the ultimate moment to teach visitors about how power was envisioned and executed in the Early Republic. The portrayal of powerful figures as infallible only distances guests from knowing and understanding the subject. This meaningful connection is essential to appreciating the significance of early leaders and why they were selected for this service.

Washington, as he exists within Mount Vernon's interpretation, was always a successful military leader; in the interpretive film he was successful as an officer in the French and Indian conflict. Truthfully, Washington's original expeditions in the French and Indian War to Fort Duquesne ended in retreat. While Washington's strategy in the Revolution eventually ended in victory, this was as much through the assistance of British General Cornwallis and the Marquis de Lafayette as Washington's work. Washington achieved a number of victories, but also many defeats in the Revolution,

leading to mutinies in Pennsylvania and New Jersey by 1780. The presentation of Washington as a great military leader is in accordance with popular memory, but not consistent with the historical narrative.¹¹

At Mount Vernon, according to the site's present interpretation, Washington was always a successful tobacco planter and plantation manager. In truth, Washington was away much of the time during critical years, so Martha Washington and a series of diligent overseers and managers can be credited with the successful management of the plantation. While Washington attempted to manage the farm through correspondence, he was not frequently present for day-to-day operations. Also, Washington was not a highly successful tobacco planter, favoring wheat or corn as a cash crop. According to the official guide to Mount Vernon, "Washington quickly recognized the shortcomings of traditional tobacco farming and began to seek improved ways of cultivating Mount Vernon's fields. As he tested new ideas and learned from his own experiences, he became a leader of the progressive farmers of his time."¹² The guide is reluctant, just as interpreters have been, to admit that any shortcomings existed in the farmer Washington. He did not fail with tobacco, he merely "recognized its shortcomings" and then the discussion becomes very carefully worded, neither confirming nor denying if Washington continued in tobacco cultivation. The inference is that he found a better way to cultivate

¹¹ For analysis of Washington as a military leader, see: John Buchanan, *The Road to Valley Forge: How Washington Built the Army that Won the Revolution* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2004); Thomas J. Fleming, *Washington's Secret War: The Hidden History of Valley Forge* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2005); Christopher Harris, *Public Lives, Private Virtues: Images of American Revolutionary War Heroes, 1782-1832* (New York: Garland, 2000); and Edward Lengel, *General George Washington: A Military Life* (New York: Random House, 2005).

¹² Charles C. Wall, et al., eds., *George Washington's Mount Vernon Official Guidebook* (Quebecor, 2001), 120. This guidebook was originally published in the late 1970s, but it does not appear to have undergone substantive changes since that time other than new introductions from program directors.

the crop, not that he gave up on it. Perhaps there is some danger to the legacy of Washington if visitors discover that he failed where his neighbors excelled. However, it is unlikely that this knowledge would change the popular perception of Washington; it does not indicate that there were other Virginians better or more deserving of power, or that others could have had the same or greater impact that Washington did on the new nation. Power was not vested in Washington based on agricultural prowess.

The issue of children at Mount Vernon is also telling in its interpretation. General Washington raised his wife's children and grandchildren as his own children. Mrs. Washington's first marriage to Daniel Parke Custis produced two children, John Parke Custis and Martha Parke Custis. After the death of Daniel Parke Custis when the children were quite young, Martha married George Washington. The family then relocated to Mount Vernon. Years later, the two youngest children of John Parke Custis, Eleanor Parke Custis (known as Nelly) and George Washington Custis (known as Washy) also lived with the Washingtons at Mount Vernon after the death of their father. These four children are depicted in portraiture, sculpture, and exhibit labels in several locations throughout Mount Vernon but the familial connections are not addressed. These must be obtained from the official guidebook for the site or from the interpretive center or by directly questioning a docent. The lack of clear familial connections is surprising given the use of family letters in interpretation. Eleanor (Nelly) Custis Lewis' letters provide a wonderful perspective on life at Mount Vernon after the presidency and they are used in

several locations to enliven the narrative, but her connection to Washington is unclear.¹³

A prominent bronze statue in the visitor's center shows Martha and George, and two small children, walking hand in hand, despite the fact that Mount Vernon is rarely interpreted as a family home within the grounds itself. The interpretive film shows General Washington stopping home during the Revolution and being greeted by children. It is not always readily evident at Mount Vernon whether or not these were George Washington's children. The childlessness of the marriage was not a flaw of Washington's, but it is telling that this point is not more obvious. There has been speculation that Washington was sterile. Certainly Martha Washington could bear children at least in her marriage to Daniel Parke Custis. This may speak to a larger idea about the father of the nation having the inability to be a father. While it would be impossible to fully remove the children from the home, the decisions made by interpreters have trivialized their presence and one of Washington's domestic roles, that of step-father and grandfather.¹⁴

The place of Mount Vernon as a family home and a location where a significant number of free and unfree workers toiled for many years has presented a challenge for interpreters. Persons other than Washington are present in the tours at Mount Vernon, but they rarely have a meaningful voice or provide additional perspective. Extensive writings

¹³ George Washington and Eleanor Custis Lewis were very close. Eleanor Parke Custis came to live with her grandmother, Martha Washington, as a young child, and was closer to her grandparents than to her biological parents. She lived with them at Mount Vernon and in Philadelphia at times and was an expected fixture in the Washington household according to guests. She later married Washington's nephew, Lawrence Lewis. The relationship between Nelly and her grandparents is described in Nelly Custis Lewis, *George Washington's Beautiful Nelly: The Letters of Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis to Elizabeth Bordley Gibson, 1794-1851* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

¹⁴ Wall., 8 – 9, 143.

have been retained from members of the Washington family over time, meaning that significant perspective and faithful representation of these historical actors is possible. Those persons that are mentioned the most frequently are Martha Washington, Eleanor Custis Lewis, several overseers and secretaries such as Ablin Rawlings, and a male and female slave. Some of these historical actors are depicted by costumed interpreters that encourage guests to become involved in special programs or encourage specific questions, but this causes significant confusion. Since these ancillary characters are not really introduced on the residence tour and are rarely discussed by docents, their significance and context are lost on the visitors. In fact, the first questions of every guest in encountering one of these interpreters are questions of identification, not deeper questions about interaction or meaning. None of these characters, despite their mention, are ever allowed to share the significance of Washington himself. For example, the tour of the residence ends at the death of Washington, as if all time stopped at that moment. This moment is not only artificial but does not provide any connection to the realities of everyday life; it fails to create connections with guests and denies the agency of the other Washington family members and dependents. While it may be easy to create a Mount Vernon that exists in a vacuum and rotates simply around a single person, it does not satisfy the needs of guests or create a sense of real history or everyday life.

The experience developed for the visitor at Mount Vernon is one of mixed messages and communicated through a wealth of information. This is not to argue that the visitor experience at Mount Vernon is not truly remarkable. The grounds are beautifully maintained, the visitor information is accessible and well organized, and there

are many activities to keep guests engaged and busy for a full day. The Mount Vernon compound includes the Ford Orientation Center with an introductory film narrated by Pat Sajack, the residence and grounds with a number of outbuildings, the tomb of the Washingtons, a small working farm, and the large and impressive Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center. Guests are offered a number of choices for touring the grounds. They can wander on their own with a map and use the interpretive signs, they can take the audio tour which guides them through the grounds and offers different information than the interpretive signs, or they can take periodic special topics tours of the gardens, slave quarters, and other aspects of the estate. The one element of the grounds for which there is not an alternative option is the residence itself.

Tours of the residence are tightly controlled and timed. Guests line up for the tour and are then moved room by room from the servant's hall into the main dwelling. The tour has been organized in a way that does not flow easily from space to space. Guests must wait in line outside each room or space for their turn with the docent responsible for each area. The docent in each location conveys very basic information—Washington ate here, Washington slept here, Washington died here—before pointing out a few interesting elements of the architecture, design, or decorative arts, taking a few questions, relating a short snippet of a Washington document or moment in his life, then moving guests on to the next waiting area. More time for guests is spent waiting during the tour than actually interacting in the residence with a docent or being presented with historical context. Several locations on the Mount Vernon grounds, including the house tour, point to the fact that the Washingtons were plagued with guests after the presidency and that

Washington himself in writing to his mother compared the residence to a "well restored tavern."¹⁵ Posthumously, it seems, Washington is still plagued with visitors, but these visitors likely receive none of the satisfaction in the residence that eighteenth-century visitors did. Moments with docents are brief, the majority of the tour is in the waiting, and the end result of this organization is that the residence, the main purpose of the site, has lost some of its significance.

Reviewer Martha Hill of *The Public Historian* argues that the tour of the residence is the "least successful aspect of the museum's programs" due to the volume of guests and the restrictions of time.¹⁶ Hill's assessment, while completely valid, seeks to apologize for a tour that is inadequate and unsuccessful by arguing that popularity has crippled quality. In truth, a tour presented in this manner at other historic sites across the country would be considered unacceptable by visitors and reviewers alike. Mount Vernon has compensated for the poor representation of the residence by busying guests with other concerns and telling the story of Washington instead in the interpretive center. The tour of the residence does not provide substantive information, challenge guests, or provide historical context. The main theme of the tour, ironically, seems to be "Washington slept here," a phrase which has become a model for public historians to avoid when developing effective tours with meaningful significance. The presence of Washington at Mount Vernon provides sufficient significance for the importance of the site. But the name alone cannot create meaning for the visitor. It must be possible to

¹⁵ George Washington to Mary Washington, February 15, 1787 in Wall, 62.

¹⁶ Martha Hill, review of George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate and Garden, by Mount Vernon Ladies Association, *The Public Historian* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 101 – 102.

develop a tour program that presents high quality tours of the residence for appropriately sized groups without long waits. A tour that is continuous, has a strong context, and encourages guest exploration and understanding, should be the main goal. Mount Vernon may be the most popular heritage tourism site in the nation, but there are other sites that attract large crowds which find ways to accommodate them without sacrificing interpretive quality. Monticello accommodates large crowds with timed entry tickets for a limited numbers of guests per tour. The Governor's Palace at Colonial Williamsburg also limits group size and creates breaks in the early stages of the tour to discuss context in order to keep guests moving and interacting while essentially waiting for their tour to begin. Since the waiting in Williamsburg is educational, it is seen as part of the larger tour. Independence Hall in Philadelphia employs both timed entry tickets and small context breaks before the tour proper, creating a seamless transition that keeps crowds moving and interacting.

The existing Mount Vernon residence tour could be enhanced greatly by filling the waiting time with something meaningful. Currently, guests just stand, talking among themselves, looking out at the grounds or the Potomac, losing the interpretive thread and divorcing themselves from the sense of time constructed on the interior. This is a tremendous opportunity for interpreters to take advantage of an eager and captive audience to make a larger point or make connections. Here are people, eager to learn, looking for information. Sometimes a docent walks by and asks if there are questions, but this is infrequent. A more effective tour could easily be achieved with a stationary docent that continues the tour by providing historical context of the Washington family, the

significance of the river, and discussing what life was like on a daily basis in the residence. Visitors would in turn not mind the wait because they would not envision it as one; instead this would be seen as a continuation of the tour in another location. Another possible solution is a timed entry ticket for a dedicated tour with no more than ten to twenty visitors in a group. While this would likely cause sellouts, a sizable amount of people could still be accommodated on a daily basis for a tour that would be more fulfilling. As it currently stands, the best way to see the interior of the residence is through the printed *George Washington's Mount Vernon* available at the gift shop or as part of a ticket package. As the official guide, the book presents photographs of a number of the rooms, including those not on the tour. In addition, it provides a more thorough explanation of the objects contained within and what everyday life was like for the Washingtons at Mount Vernon. Most importantly, the guidebook includes the types of discussions and contextual information that should exist in the current tour. As the current tour does not provide enough contextual information guests are left without a good understanding of the significance of the site.

Guests walking the grounds can be heard asking questions of each other and docents, but not the type of questions that interpreters should strive for—questions concerning contexts and connections. Rather than interested guests requesting more information, guests are plagued by questions of confusion or clarification because the message is not clear. While guests seem to understand that the Washington residing at Mount Vernon is different from the one that resides in their memory, they are not provided with the information to effectively bridge this gap. This confusion begins at the

orientation center and is amplified in the museum and education center. For example, the introductory film at the orientation center begins with Washington during the French and Indian War, a biographical moment that has little bearing on the site and does not provide effective context or explanation. Guests can be heard walking the grounds later asking each other about Indians. Rather than focusing on the fact of Washington as a military leader, or immersing themselves in the experience on the grounds, some guests are still trying to figure out if the Indians in the movie were allies or enemies. One of the biggest challenges for guests at Mount Vernon is the volume of information presented.

It seems improbable for a heritage site to present too much information to guests. Guests on the whole thirst for information. They want to know and understand, they want to make meaningful connections to people, places, and history. Visitors to historic sites come because they are receptive to an educational experience. They are the easiest audience to interact with, they are typically willing participants. They are coming not just to be entertained and see “old things”, they are looking for education. They seek meaningful details with which to enhance their understanding of specific historic moments or figures. They also seek a meaningful experience with which to reconcile their existing conception of the American past. It is this fact about the heritage tourist that public historians must embrace and understand. For this audience, interpreters have the ultimate power, they can shape the public memory of this group of people and change the way they perceive the past. Public historians must negotiate a balance between appropriate and well-presented information and an overabundance of superfluous information in order to ensure that the message is clear and desired effect achieved.

In the case of Mount Vernon, there is much information available for presentation. Washington was a popular figure, even in his own lifetime. His belongings, writings, the writings of others, have been preserved over time. There is a wealth of information available at Mount Vernon for interpreters to utilize. Unfortunately, its presentation is sometimes overwhelming to guests who are seeking a concise narrative. By the time guests have watched the interpretive film, visited the grounds, interacted with educational materials, and finally made it to the interpretive center, the experience has become an overwhelming blur. The prevalence of surplus information at the site has confused the overall mission. Indeed, Mount Vernon seems to prove that it is possible to present too much information.

A good example of this overabundance of facts can be seen by comparing two elements of the Mount Vernon historic site, the grounds tour programs and the interpretive center. The grounds tour programs are full of excellent information. The theme they are presenting relates to Washington as an effective businessman and plantation manager. Guests who are taking a self-guided tour have the ability to use a map to direct them to outbuildings and points of interest, each with a free standing sign. The interpretive signs give information on the use of each outbuilding. Guests that take a guided audio tour of the grounds have headsets that respond to the same outbuildings but give different information—not only some of the basic information as listed on the signs, but also sounds, dramatic readings, and excerpts from documents. It is possible to listen to the interpretation on the audio tour, and then stop to read the sign, and learn something entirely different about how the Washingtons interacted with their environment. Also part

of the grounds programs are individual topical tours on a number of subjects. The tour covering slavery also deals with the outbuildings, discussing who would work there, and also describing Washington as an effective manager. The fact that Washington owned slaves is readily apparent and his use of them is typically described in practical, businesslike terms. The cumulative impression given from these three tours is that on the grounds Washington was an effective manager. In a society that prizes effective capitalists and sees monetary success as evidence of personal achievement, the portrayal of Washington as an effective businessman in his personal affairs becomes evidence of his worthiness for power and influence, not only in the community but in the nation. The grounds tours present a wealth of information, but the information comes together easily in the minds of guests based on the presentation. Context is given in small doses and supported by both audio and visual elements to make a cohesive message possible by the conclusion of the tour. In this case, much information on Washington and his life is imparted, but it has been constructed in a manner that creates deeper understanding and guest interaction with the theme. Washington's daily life at Mount Vernon is used effectively to make a larger point about his ability to manage and accumulate wealth. This resonates easily with guests and remains with them as they continue their journey on the grounds.

A case where an overabundance of information does not create an effective guest experience is found in the Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center. This new interpretive center at Mount Vernon is truly astonishing. It is beautifully structured and organized. It serves as a physical biography of Washington. Washington as a great

military and civil leader, good businessman, and father of our nation are all displayed here. Guests are encouraged to interact. There are many things to see and explore. The impact is overwhelming. Visitors have the ability to listen to things said about Washington, to listen in to great moments in Washington's life, and to see his most important moments on display. Few aspects of Washington's life are left unexplored. The one topic that is not evident within the center is the purpose of the installation in relation to the site. The education center functions as a repository of historical context, perhaps a conscious decision meant to offset the lack of context on the residence tour. The main function appears to be a continuation of the cult of Washington that has existed since the nineteenth century, only on a larger and higher tech scale. This is a tremendous amount of information on many, many topics whose main purpose seems to be encouragement of respect for Washington and awe at his power. Not only is there too much information here, but it seems divorced from the overall Mount Vernon experience. This installation could exist anywhere. It could be at any museum in any town across America for students to explore and families to visit to become connected to Washington. However, it is installed mere steps from Washington's residence. Visitors should be encouraged to understand Washington through his eyes at the residence that was important to him. Even the scale of the museum overshadows the heritage experience available outside the door on the grounds and in the residence. Guests will likely get more basic facts from the museum than from the residence and grounds because this is the goal of the organizational structure in place. The interpretive center will answer the questions of confusion that many are asking about Washington; unfortunately they have developed

these questions based on what is missing at the actual heritage site. For example, there are a number of material culture items housed in the interpretive center that are discussed thoroughly in effective exhibit labels. The exhibit labels provide more information than is given by docents on any single item of material culture within the residence. Material culture items are in fact not discussed at the residence, only pointed out if guests ask about them. This is not an argument against interpretive centers, but an argument that interpretive centers are better used to amplify the heritage experience, rather than replace it. The museum at Monticello's visitor center is a good example of such an interpretive center and museum that deepens the visitor experience while not overwhelming or confusing the major narratives or themes, such as occurs at Mount Vernon.

Historian Steve Frank's review of the Reynolds Museum and Education Center revealed still more locations for confusion within the design and execution of the programs.¹⁷ Frank points out that the location of artifacts and interpretation within the center is sometimes disjointed. For example, Washington's Will in the museum portion, but the discussion of the will is in the education center. Frank also points out that age targets in the two portions of the center are confusing and do not always provide the best experience. Assertions by interpreters that the center was created for school programs, particularly eighth grade students, is particularly problematic, given that Mount Vernon attracts many guests of differing ages and educations throughout the year. The message available should be accessible to all and focus on a presenting a history that shapes public

¹⁷ Steve Frank, review of Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center, Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens, by Mount Vernon Ladies Association, *The Journal of American History* 94, no. 3 (December 2007): 881-885.

memory at every age level. The work of creating a correct civic memory and realistic understanding of the founders can easily begin at school age but the work must continue into adulthood.

Frank argues that the Orientation Center deals with the private life of Washington, which he deems the most appropriate use of the center, rather than deal with the military or political aspect. This argument is flawed. Visitors should be learning about the private Washington as a man with a wife and home that owned and operated a plantation outside of the doors of the Reynolds Center and on the grounds of the residence and plantation. It should be the private man on display at the private residence because this is where the private Washington existed. A glimpse of the everyday Washington would be a very powerful addition to the existing public memory. It would add another, more personal dimension that makes Washington into less of a legend and more of a real person who was able to both live a successful private life and serve his nation effectively. While the Orientation Center can deal with the private life of the president, it would be more appropriate to encourage guests to deal more deeply with the political, military, and historical aspects that are not directly available on the site within the center. In its best usage, the Orientation Center can put the legacy of Washington into meaningful context by asking challenging questions and encouraging guests to interact with them in a deeper manner.¹⁸

The mixed messages of Mount Vernon are surprising given the history of the site. The retention and preservation of Mount Vernon as carried out by the Mount Vernon

¹⁸ Frank, 882.

Ladies Association was a powerful early step in the historic preservation movement. Their diligence in saving the site as a “national shrine” is to be commended, as is their continued stewardship. However, it seems contradictory to the original mission that the residence has become such a weakness in the overall presentation. Based on the ideological foundations of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, the residence should be the crown jewel. The current crown jewel of the site seems to be the interpretive center. Which is unfortunate as it is not the place where the history occurred and it is not a site of historical significance. Yet it is vested with interpretive significance as the site where some of the context resides. On one level, the Mount Vernon experience is quite faithful to the ideas of the Mount Vernon Ladies Associations’ original plans, the creation of a national shrine. Mount Vernon does have the feel of a modern shrine where guests can come to feel the power of the first president and try to understand why he is so important. Unfortunately, without a strong residence tour and with a sometimes faltering context, the location functions only as a shrine in its most superficial sense, missing the opportunity to provide a rich, deep, and textured experience for heritage tourists.

In sharp contrast to the presidential experiences provided at Monticello and Mount Vernon is Adams National Historical Park in Quincy, Massachusetts. The tone and interpretation at this National Park Service administered property speaks to different qualities present in the founders and early presidents while arguing that the root of power lays in intelligence and civic responsibility supported by a strong family. The largest Adams residence in Adams National Historical Park is “The Old House at Peacefield”, home to John and Abigail Adams during and after his presidency. It also became the

home of John Quincy Adams and many other generations of Adams statesmen. The tone of this site is focused on the Adamses as a founding family and the historical context is never in question. The argument for the significance of the Adamses and their connection to the site is made from the earliest moments of the tour, which begins at the John Adams birthplace several miles away from Peacefield. The official guide to Adams National Historical Park makes context a priority. The significance of the site and its inhabitants is spelled out even before its first page, on the inside front cover. Author Caroline Keinath explains that “John Adams began a family legacy of public service and active citizenship that spanned over two hundred years” and “The voices of individuals like John Adams were critical to establishing the architecture of our democratic society, acting as sparks that ignited the flame that has burned for over two hundred years of the American experience.”¹⁹ The context is very clearly presented to guests and this thread is prominent within the tour as the three Adams residences are not just on display, but discussed as documents, testaments to the success of John Adams, and locations of historic Adams moments.

Adams National Historical Park does not include an elaborate visitors or interpretive center as do Monticello and Mount Vernon. The visitor’s center is contained in a small portion of the first floor of an office building in downtown Quincy. It does not include a museum or an interpretive film. Only a bookstore and a rotating presentation of one of many Hollywood films made about John Adams and the founding augment the

¹⁹ Caroline Kienath, *Adams National Historical Park: Quincy, Massachusetts* (Lawrenceburg, IN: The Creative Company, 2008), inside front cover. I have referred to the residence here as “Peacefield” for ease of discussion. This name was proposed by Adams, but never stuck. The family typically referred to the residence as “the Old House.”

site. It functions primarily as a ticket center and a place to catch the bus to the residences. The National Park Service interpreters have created a thorough and effective tour through the three Adams residences which pays particular attention to both the personal and political lives of the Adamses. This has made an interpretive center unnecessary.

The most striking element of Adams National Historical Park is how well the sites represent John Adams himself. There is a sense that this experience and the characterization of the second president would have been in accordance with Adams' own wishes. In the John Adams birthplace and at the John Quincy Adams birthplace, which was the family home for many years, Adams is portrayed as a man of humble origins. As a minister's son instead of the son of a planter or a member of the aristocracy, the early life of John and John Quincy Adams is quite different from that of Washington or Jefferson. The relatively modest New England saltbox that is the John Quincy Adams birthplace is the size of some of the ancillary structures at Mount Vernon or Monticello. The early residences of Jefferson and Washington do not remain to provide comparison, but visitors to Adams National Historical Park are provided with the opportunity to see power develop in an individual who had a voice in his community and would eventually lead his nation.

Visitors on the tour of the John Adams and John Quincy Adams birthplaces learn what life was like in New England prior to the Revolution. They learn about the concern of John Adams' father that young John learn a trade and his desire to have his son join the ministry. John Adams instead selected law over theology and became a prominent lawyer in Boston, famously defending the soldiers of the Boston Massacre during his

career. Visitors see the rise of John Adams from minister's son, to prominent lawyer, to partial framer of the Massachusetts Constitution, to delegate, vice president, and then president. In the midst of this rise guests are encouraged to understand how these movements impacted his everyday life, the stresses placed on the family, the need to expand the family home and then relocate entirely. Most of all they are able to see that Adams gained power in the colonies, then the new governments, and how this was accomplished. Adams was a man who through education, intellect, and persistence, earned the power he attained. The Revolution and then Constitution made it possible for someone like Adams from humble beginnings to rise to the highest office in the land. Significantly, the Adams story is never portrayed as typical. Park service docents are careful to explain that Adams was a man of intellect and ingenuity with particular legal talents that led him down this path. He lived in proximity to a location that had the international spotlight and placed himself within it. Much as the docents at Monticello argue of Jefferson, Adams was a man who used knowledge to access power.

The main Adams residence, Peacefield, is described as a family farm, as John Adams himself envisioned it. It includes a number of ancillary voices because it is interpreted as the home of the Adams family over many generations, not just as the home of John Adams or John Quincy Adams. As guests tour the residence, they are encouraged to understand each room and the use the family had for it. Furnishings and decorative arts are an element of the tour, but as part of a larger story about an American family and the renovations to their "modest" farm. They are used as tools to enhance the narrative. The lower floor focuses more on the life of John and Abigail Adams, particularly after the

presidency. The tour discusses the needs of the family and the work Abigail had done to the residence to ensure that it met their needs socially. The upper floors discuss John Quincy Adams and John Adams more thoroughly, particularly the declining years of John and Abigail. Overall, guests leave the house with the understanding that the Adamses were a remarkable family, not merely a powerful one. The tour has impact for visitors because of the emphasis on everyday life. Guests are encouraged to understand the way the residence functioned for the family over time. Individual rooms are not just showcases for antiques; the practical function of each space for the Adamses is explored. Docents give the impression that visitors are getting a rare glimpse into the daily life of a president and his family, an idea that is tantalizing and powerful. This type of inside look creates a more meaningful experience and inspires guests to reform their previous notions of John Adams.

Docents at Peacefield do not need to explain all aspects of who John Adams was, as most guests are familiar with some aspects of the second president's life in a very basic way. Some visitors are familiar with his correspondence with Abigail Adams, many remember that he was the second president, but what they are not familiar with is how this man and his family presided over everyday life. Part of the success of the tours of the Adams residences is obtained through use of the sources. Many members of the Adams clan were prolific writers with volumes of correspondence. These letters include details about life at the two main Adams residences, the Old House at Peacefield and the John Quincy Adams birthplace. Docents include information from these letters in their tours including a discussion of why there is so much correspondence and where in the

residence this correspondence took place. When the Adams residences were acquired they were family homes that had been continuously occupied, each with very lengthy histories and large amounts of furnishings and documents. Both sites use present primary sources and innovative planning to create tours that speak to guests in a way that gives important information and interaction with primary sources, but not so much information as to overwhelm.

While the Adams residence tours do not overwhelm with information, they do provide very specific and directed information. The discussion of flaws is not prominent in Quincy, although it is not absent as at Mount Vernon. John Adams has been portrayed by several historians as a man with deep issues of self-esteem and overwhelming concern about his legacy. Adams was not always a popular man in his lifetime. Some of his political decisions, such as the Alien and Sedition Acts, were problematic at best. He was frequently cast by the opposition as a monarchist. In addition his correspondence bears out a man who later in life was so concerned with his own legacy that he worked to tarnish the legacy of others.²⁰ In correspondence with Benjamin Rush and Benjamin Waterhouse, Adams criticized the partisan and overt celebration of contemporaries such as Washington and Hamilton, particularly singling out Mount Vernon as a location that had gained too much prominence. Adams instead emphasized the role of the people played in the founding rather than individuals. The modern public is left unaware that their visitation of locations such as Quincy might have been offensive to the former

²⁰ Joseph J. Ellis, *American Creation: Triumphs and tragedies at the Founding of the Republic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 2007), 7.

resident, or perhaps, secretly, exactly what he would have wished.²¹ These aspects of Adams' character are largely missing in the characterization of him at Peacefield. He is presented instead as a man worthy of respect as a former president and founder, and the patriarch of an influential family.²²

Discussion of power at the Adams residences is subtle but meaningful. The Adamses gained power through their commitment to public service, aided by their intelligence and success in law and politics. Both John and Abigail Adams are described as politically savvy with tremendous understanding of the significance of the events of their lifetime. Both were aware that history would judge their actions but they acted in a way that they felt was right for the nation rather than what was popular for the masses.

History has judged John Adams as less powerful and influential than George Washington or Thomas Jefferson. While typically acknowledged for his intelligence and commitment, Adams does not possess the same character attributes or life experiences that have made Jefferson and Washington such popular figures in the present. The Adams presidency is not typically considered to be as successful as those before or after. Nonetheless, Adams ran in a national election and was elected vice president. Later Adams was elected to the presidency, defeating Jefferson in 1796. This indicates that Adams did possess power in the eighteenth century and was vested in the same power

²¹ John Adams to Benjamin Rush, March 14, 1809 in *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805 – 1813*, ed. John A. Schultz and Douglass Adair (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1966), 136 – 7. This correspondence is also addressed in Ellis, *American Creation*, 6.

²² For a biographical analysis of Adams, see: John P. Diggins, *John Adams* (New York: Times Books, 2003); Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001); John E. Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992); James Grant, *John Adams: Party of One* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005); and David G. McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

given to Washington and Jefferson, albeit for four years rather than eight. A comparison of the residences at Monticello, Mount Vernon, and Quincy, without knowledge of their ownership, would lead an observer to conclude that the residence at Quincy belonged to a less powerful man. Accounting for this difference physically and politically becomes the challenge for docents, interpreters, and visitors.

Based on this comparison, it is clear that portrayal of political power is not the most significant aspect of the presidential home experience or it would be a leveling factor. The difference here between Adams, Jefferson, and Washington, then, is power and its display as exhibited outside of the office of the president in architecture and design. All three residence tours include a deeper discussion of lives outside of the presidency rather than during it. The architecture and interior design on display in these residences was evidence of power on the eighteenth-century landscape and was visually meaningful for contemporary visitors. It should retain this context for modern visitors. The Adams residence is less visually impressive on the landscape than the plantations of Monticello and Mount Vernon. The Adams residences do not betray overwhelming wealth, chattel slavery, or conspicuous consumption. However, these are typically Virginian in character, not wholly American. Their portrayal as American in nature, rather than emphasis being placed on regional diversity, clouds the judgment of the modern visitor. The primary Adams residence, renovated from its original, more modest Dutch colonial antecedent by John and Abigail was a substantial dwelling for the neighborhood. As a New England country farm it was of significant size and indicative of wealth. And the furnishing of the interior, particularly the first floor salon, spoke of

European-influenced taste, social grace, and prosperity. The substantial and palatial residences typical of Virginia planters were not typical in the Massachusetts countryside, which obscures the visitor's ability to consider the significance of the site successfully. The connection between power and the built environment must be clear for guests in order for them to contextualize each site successfully.²³

In order to better understand the portrayal of power and difference at presidential sites, it is fruitful to consider other locations of eighteenth-century power in America. A useful comparison between sites of obvious power and sites of lesser known influence can be made to Stenton, the home of the Logan family of Germantown, Pennsylvania. James Logan, the original owner of Stenton and an agent for the Penn family, later became significant in the governance of the Pennsylvania colony and his sons and daughters became influential members of the Philadelphia elite in later generations. The power that resided at Stenton is not known or obvious to visitors. Logan is as good as anonymous as guests walk through the door; he is not nationally known as Washington, Jefferson, or Adams. Interpreters at Stenton must therefore construct a tour that includes introduction to the significance and context of the Logan family, but also makes meaningful use of the residence and documents available. While the tour at Stenton is not always completely successful in these goals, the portrayal of eighteenth-century power provides a useful contrast to presidential sites where power is more easily established for guests.

²³ For more discussion of the significance of contextualizing the built environment for visitors see Chapter 2.

Stenton is an unusual site in that it has many documents from several generations of Logans, male and female, and also some from prominent men of the time that would be recognizable to guests. The brochure for Stenton includes not just a number of quotes from three generations of Logan men (the original owners) but also from Thomas Jefferson, William Penn, and Benjamin Franklin.²⁴ From this earliest stage of guest interaction with the site, the brochure works to lure guests in for the heritage experience; Stenton is establishing its connection with known historical actors and establishing its significance on the landscape. Quotations containing enthusiastic endorsements from Jefferson, Penn, and Franklin, prominent men that visited Stenton, encourage guests into two assumptions that engage their interest. The first, that men of power visited this location because of its value. Second, that the residence must itself be a location of power. Given the distinguished historical guests to the home, it follows that the residents of Stenton must also have been powerful. The association with power and prominence is established from the very beginning, so that guests approach the property in the proper state of mind. It directs their interest, questions, and interaction by creating the illusion of power through advertising.

The Stenton experience provides a number of features akin to those at more highly-funded and prominent locations of power. The residence is beautifully maintained, almost entirely extant from the eighteenth century with many outbuildings, and it has a fantastic collection of period decorative arts original to the residence. Docents discuss the use of many of these artifacts. They point out significant elements of the architecture

²⁴ National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, *Stenton: Country House of James Logan* (Germantown, Pennsylvania, 2009).

such as the entrance hall and the symmetry of the façade, and they discuss the importance of Germantown to nearby Philadelphia as well. These are all important conversations to have about this country estate and its overall context. The significance of the residence and its inhabitants at a local, state, and national level is essential to establishing the prominence of the site. These ideas are encompassed in the interpretive plan for the property, developed in spring of 2003 to improve presentation at the site.²⁵

According to the interpretive plan for Stenton, the primary period of interpretation and person of interpretation is James Logan and his lifetime. He constructed the residence and worked as an agent for the Penn family. James Logan was a powerful man in the colony of Pennsylvania and significant to the history of Stenton because he commissioned the residence and used it as the seat of his authority in the colony. The power of James Logan directs the tour, interpretation of artifacts, and the goals for the guest experience. To this end, the docents emphasize the importance of James Logan to his community at every opportunity. Every artifact is a document supporting the assertion that a man of power resided in this place. Stenton attains its prominence, and has been preserved and interpreted over many years because of this interpretation of James Logan. The fuller use of the site and its artifacts to assert power is very different than that found at presidential sites.

At the presidential sites attention is not paid as fully to artifacts, architecture or documents as it is at the Logan residence. The interpreters at Stenton are charged with

²⁵Stephan Hague and Laura Keim Stutman, "Stenton: The Interpretive Plan," The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, <http://www.stenton.org/research/plan.cfm> (accessed July 13, 2009).

making an argument that is essential to their very self-preservation. They must prove that James Logan and his residence were powerful and significant in order to protect themselves and their charge from generations of encroaching development. This is not a danger at Monticello or Mount Vernon. These properties have been whittled away over time, but they retain significant grounds that do not always betray modern encroachment. Peacefield has experienced some modern residential encroachment, but interpreters have developed programs to counteract this problem. Americans would not consider the destruction of a presidential residence to make way for a shopping mall or apartment complex. Other historic residences do not have this luxury. In order to continue their mission and stewardship to the past, they must develop compelling tours, draw in visitors to generate revenue and cover costs, and continually make an argument of significance. To this end, many smaller sites have developed high quality tours that make significant arguments about power. At Stenton, every part of the residence is associated with a power-driven argument. The location of the residence, its architectural style, the method by which Logan's visitors moved through public and private spaces, all speak to the power of James Logan. This is conveyed to guests by docents who work consistently to explain what power was in this period, how it physically manifested itself, and how that power was exercised.

The interpreters at Stenton would not be able to continue successfully using the type of approach employed at Mount Vernon or Monticello. These locations take the power for granted and work harder to straighten out issues of legacy rather than legitimacy. However, it is also significant to understand that the character of power had

changed from the time of Logan to the time of Jefferson, which influences interpretation. For Logan, power came from monetary success and access within the proprietary government. This power was visible in the location of this residence and in its style, a country house as was appropriate to a country gentleman. The residence was constructed in the style of English country houses, with a strong emphasis on symmetry, extensive glazing, and substantial structure. Logan's power was also manifest in the guests that were drawn to visit, a list that was sure to be known to others among the powerful and even among the lower sorts through backalley gossip. Logan furnished his residence lavishly with fine imports from England according to fashion and raised his family accordingly. Logan's power came from a physical representation of position and wealth and from successful Anglicization.

By the time of the Early Republic, Anglicization had fallen largely out of fashion for many Americans. While England remained a significant trading partner, it was not the only arbiter of taste or power. By the time that Washington, Jefferson, and Adams were establishing power on a physical landscape vis-à-vis their residences, the method of manifesting that power was different. Washington and Jefferson both constructed, and continued to construct during their lifetime, residences that differed from Stenton in architectural style based on the meanings associated with style. Jefferson was clearly responding to studies of Palladio, Washington may not have studied any architectural masters but merely mimicked the successful and fashionable style of others in his renovations at Mount Vernon.²⁶ This new tradition of building in the Early Republic was

²⁶ Dalzell, 545 – 547.

based on classical tradition and classical learning, so important to cultured men of the eighteenth century and to the foundation of a republic based on historical precedent. The architecture of the Roman Republic assisted in the establishment of legitimacy in this new republic. Power was not longer vested in association with English styles, but with classical motifs as they manifested themselves in the built environment and decorative arts.

In addition to alterations in building style, Washington, Jefferson, and Adams had to remain more reserved in their use of wealth to establish power. In a republic, manifestation of conspicuous wealth could just as easily signal corruption or interest rather than the positive qualities of humble leadership and civic responsibility. While it is obvious that the leaders of the Early Republic were wealthy, it was intellect, effective leadership, and character that beat a path to the presidency. To this end, Jefferson and Washington divested themselves of wealth (what was left of it) at the end of their lives, having embraced more republican standards.²⁷ Even the interiors of these founder's homes, while certainly very fine, did not depend on English fashion, rather embracing a number of others including French, Dutch, and uniquely American tastes. A telling example, the marble chimneypiece in Mount Vernon's "New Room," a gift from an English merchant, created concern and reluctance in the careful statesman who argued that it was "too elegant and costly by far... for my own room and republican style of living."²⁸ This idea of a "republican style of living," then, is essential to understanding the

²⁷ Ibid., 579.

²⁸ Quoted in Hugh Howard, *Houses of the Founding Fathers* (New York: Artisan Books, 2007), 262. This chimneypiece, and Washington's concern for it, are not presented to the public on the Mount

residences of the founders, and to physical manifestations of power. With this in mind, the comparison between Peacefield, Monticello, and Mount Vernon takes on a new dynamic. Adams renovated the Old Farm at Peacefield after the new taste for republican living had been developed. Taste, wealth, intellect, and leadership, work hand in hand at historic sites to Part of the interpretation of eighteenth-century power appropriate to the Early Republic.

Despite the different nature of power in these two periods, the comparison to Stenton retains meaning. Stenton has undergone an extensive process to develop an interpretive plan that conveys a concise message. This was accomplished by determining which former resident of Stenton had the greatest amount of power and influence. Despite generations of inhabitants, the determination has been made that James Logan was the most significant resident, which has directed interpretation. Although in the specific case of Stenton this approach is flawed, it is nonetheless important to an overall understanding of the significance of power to interpretation and public history. Stenton was a residence full of people in the eighteenth century, people who lived their lives in a great home that was constructed to convey presence and reputation to others. Access to and understanding of power speaks volume to guests when presented properly. There are few historic sites that do not convey power of some kind, because power lends itself easily to establishing overall significance. In the case of presidential residences, the establishment of power is not a concern, but explanation of it and its manifestation

Vernon tour, although the room itself is presented. The quote from Washington about the mantelpiece is presented in the guidebook, but is not interpreted. Wall et al., 37.

creates significant challenges for interpreters, who either find it overwhelming, or refuse to deal with it fully and appropriately.

The issue of power and significance is one that deserves further exploration by public historians. While earlier generations of public historians sought to call on the unquestionably powerful to establish significance, the “Washington slept here” approach, power is still a driving force behind preservation, conservation, and the museum disciplines. The “New Social History” changed the characters worthy of inclusion in a power argument, but not the nature of the argument itself. Many modern interpreters work to find the power narrative within their subject sites. Some must also develop complicated arguments of agency to support their work on the project. It is unfortunate that the narrative of power must be present in order for a site to be deemed worthwhile. Structures that are not associated with powerful individuals or significant historical events frequently find preservation difficulty unless they are a unique example of an architectural style, which gives them architectural cache and a different reason to preserve them. The overwhelming influence of power in the historical narrative, brought on in public history by a need to convince modern powerful individuals to invest, retain, or endorse, has clouded the overarching narrative of a number of heritage sites whose primary concern should not be power at all. Stenton is a prime example. James Logan is not the most compelling or significant voice at Stenton, despite the studies developed during the interpretive planning process to argue otherwise. The female voices at Stenton, including Deborah Norris Logan, have more to teach and a better ability to interact with guests based on documentary evidence and extant material culture collections. However,

Deborah Norris Logan is mentioned only in passing, because she does not fit into a traditional power narrative as currently constructed at Stenton. The development of a strong and pervasive power narrative is so overwhelming and essential to self-preservation that smaller sites, which do not have established and well known power, are forced to overemphasize their significance on the historical landscape in order to retain legitimacy, visitorship, and funding.

Interpretation of power varies by site based on existing public memory and overarching theme. At Monticello, Mount Vernon, and Peacefield, the power is unquestioned. These men were elected president; their power speaks for itself on the political landscape. Interpreters need not address the nature of this power in the late eighteenth century, because they assume that Americans understand that the presidency is a powerful office. They do not consider that an appreciation of the acquisition of power and its significance to these individuals has a valuable meaning for guests whose public memory does not typically include this type of understanding. At locations like Stenton, interpreters must work to develop the power narrative. It is not enough for them to assume that guests understand power in this period or how it manifested itself. They must explain the significance of the architecture, the hierarchy of interior spaces, the power of furnishings, the importance of taste, and the caliber of guests to the site. At less obvious power sites interpreters must fill in all the blanks and change the minds of their guests as to what power is and who had it during their period of interpretation. They are doing the real work of altering public memory, but it is an uphill battle, because guests have not been conditioned to question where power comes from or why it matters in a nation that

is supposed to be based on the power of the people. They do not yet understand that power in the eighteenth century had little to do with “the people.” A true alteration of the public consciousness in the consideration of power has to come from those sites where the power is unquestioned, presidential sites. These sites must work to develop inquiry among guests to begin to develop true understanding of the nature and location of power in the eighteenth century.

The presentation of power at presidential residences is currently unbalanced on the whole. For those heritage tourists willing to make a grand tour of early presidential residences an overarching and balanced theme may be culled from a collective consideration of the grouping. However, this is not typical. An individual analysis of presidential locations presents a narrative far from balanced or appropriate. While part of the challenge is admittedly a public that comes with a certain set of assumptions already in place, there also exists the difficulty of developing a narrative that understands the presidents of the Early Republic in a manner that is both consistent to the historical narrative and that would be considered appropriate to the historical actors themselves. Washington, Jefferson, and Adams were powerful men of a new generation. They were removed from the truly powerful men of the colonial period, like James Logan. These three presidents of the new republic were concerned legacy. But they also concerned themselves with the image of the chief executive within the republic. The development of this image proved challenging. Citizens of the new United States and of European nations looked for evidence of monarchical tendencies in the nation. These early presidents had to ensure that they were representations of effective and republican self-government.

While all three would argue that their presentation of this power was the most appropriate, the truth is that appropriate presidential power manifested itself differently in each.

At the residences of Jefferson and Adams, interpreters work to counteract traditional eighteenth-century perceptions of the men that occupied the office of the chief executive. At Mount Vernon, interpreters wish to amplify aspects of Washington that contemporaries and historians have sought to criticize. Unfortunately this work has led to obscuring the true Washington within his residence. The Old Farm at Peacefield presents a powerful family that earned power through public service, commitment, and intelligence, while living at the same time a relatively humble life. This interpretation rests in contrast to accusations of nepotism and monarchical character within the Adams administration that fed Republican presses. At Monticello, interpreters present a man who had excellent taste, superior intellect, and was a true American. This contradicts ideas of Jefferson as a somewhat slovenly man who administered a White House that lacked proper respect for the office, and was hopelessly entangled with love for the French.

Additionally intriguing is the place of ancillary characters in the overtly masculine narrative presented at the presidential residences. While the presentation at the Old Farm at Peacefield works to rectify this situation, the master narrative at Mount Vernon and Monticello is extremely masculine and Caucasian in focus. This can be attributed to the fact that both residences are in Virginia, a location where white patriarchy was tremendously significant in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. However, the exclusion of other voices within the master narrative is troubling to the

overall presentation. While presidential residences by their nature exist for the glorification and celebration of the individual, no man works alone. This is certainly true of all three early presidents.

Interpreters perhaps would argue that additional voices are available in both locations. This is true in part. The slave perspective at Mount Vernon and Monticello is presented—but in a format that removes it from the primary narrative. The history of African-Americans at the plantation is relegated to separate and “special” tours for those interested in these voices.²⁹ More than any other type of heritage site, it is paramount that presidential residences represent the reality of living in the eighteenth century, with all voices heard together at all times. The residence was not the independent purview of the white male head of household in the eighteenth century, and to portray it as such is misleading. Women, children, slaves, servants, and employees also inhabited these spaces. Their stories cannot be pushed aside or relegated to special programs, because they were always part of the conversation. While Monticello works to point out within the main residential tour the work of slave artisans and the occasional work of slave menservants, the constant presence of white and black inhabitants and workers and their daily interaction is largely not explored in favor of focusing on Jefferson.

Similarly, the female perspective is shockingly absent from the majority of the master narratives at presidential homes. Nowhere is this more evident than at Mount Vernon where the female narrative is significant to the man and the residence yet is silenced by the interpretation. As an example, female sources are not always well

²⁹ Interpretation of eighteenth-century slavery is discussed in Chapter 5.

acknowledged within the Mount Vernon tour. While there are many, many accounts of travelers, visitors, and friends to the residence, the accounts of the day to day inhabitants are the most significant to the site. However the voices of Martha Washington and Eleanor “Nelly” Parke Custis Lewis are not usually discussed well. The audio grounds tour makes mention of some of Lewis’ writings on the Washington household, but not to great effect. The use of this resource within the residence could greatly expand the tour. Nelly Lewis describes her grandmother in retirement at Mount Vernon as happy and tranquil, working at her embroidery and involved in management of the household as would be expected of any plantation mistress. While a brief passage in one of many of Lewis’ letters, this alone illustrates a Mount Vernon that existed without Washington, himself, as a working plantation. The female perspective is presented in its best light at the Old Farm at Peacefield likely because Abigail Adams cannot be silenced. Her influence during the Adams administration and significance to Adams throughout his life is essential to telling the Adams story. At Monticello the most prominent ancillary voices are enslaved and African-American, the overall female perspective is lacking. The female African-American voice is more pronounced in exploration of the dependencies and Mulberry Row than the perspective of Jefferson’s daughters and grandchildren within the home. While information from Martha Wayles Jefferson is limited, the correspondence of daughters Martha Jefferson Randolph, Maria Jefferson Epps, and Jefferson’s grandchildren speak of life at Monticello from differing perspectives. Docents acknowledge Randolph’s use of the family sitting room for correspondence, household management, and education for her children. The large parlor is also acknowledged as a

location used for guests and for the Jefferson grandchildren to read and play music. However, despite the presence of the large Randolph family after 1808 in the residence and Jefferson's close relationship to his daughters and grandchildren, their voices are noticeably silent. A slightly greater perspective on female involvement at Monticello is gained from the available guidebook or in the museum.³⁰

The final deficiency shared by all three early presidential residences is the explanation of how these men attained the presidency, particularly the true nature of elected power in the period. Every tour does not have to begin with a political science lesson, but it is important for Americans to know who voted for these men, who vested this power within them. Popular memory is that electoral law has not changed since 1783 and that the people directly elect the president. Most Americans do not realize that voting rights and limits varied by state, that not everyone was enfranchised, and that the Constitution created a system, the Electoral College, to ensure that the executive was not directly elected by the people. Even the manner of the selection of Electoral College members created distance from the populace at large. This explanation can be simple, and can occur at the beginning of the interaction with the site, but it is important for Americans who seek knowledge on their political system and the men it privileged in the eighteenth century to understand the ability to attain the office and who placed those men in that location. It certainly changes the perception of power and the people in the eighteenth century.

³⁰ Stein, 13 – 64. An example of the voices of Jefferson women can be found in Sarah N. Randolph, *The Domestic Life of Thomas Jefferson: Compiled from Family Letters and reminiscences by Sarah N. Randolph* (Charlottesville: Published for the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation by the University Press of Virginia, 1978)

The reality for the average guest will be that the majority of them would not be fit for the political decision-making process in the eighteenth century had they lived in that era. The true functionality of a republic depended on a virtuous and disinterested citizenry making decisions as to the best leaders and laws for the nation. During the period of the Articles of Confederation, the new state governments made it clear that not all citizens of the new nation were disinterested or could be trusted to make decisions that put the nation first and their needs second. Most Americans were workers, they had an occupation and had to work at that occupation to feed their families and survive. Their education was bound up in this survival-oriented occupation, which was the extent of their knowledge and interest. Any decisions made by such persons would be for the advancement of their private needs, not for the good of the nation, in the eyes of the nation's leaders. Therefore the needed voices in leadership and voting during the Confederation and later Constitution governments were those of the disinterested, represented by gentlemen. Gentlemen were educated on a number of matters; they did not practice an occupation that caused them to have great prejudice. They had free time to cultivate their knowledge and understanding of history, philosophy, and law. They had been set apart from the masses by their education, had cultivated a life free of interest connected to survival, and were thus the most fit to rule and make decisions.³¹ The nation's first presidents, Washington, Adams, and Jefferson, believed firmly in these

³¹ Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789 – 1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 20 – 30.

divisions within society and were within the realm of the gentleman, a social standing they had worked during their lifetime to achieve and maintain.

Since gentlemen were the most fit to make these decisions and to understand who among them were the most natural leaders, the founders were challenged to develop a system that would ensure that the correct people were included making such decisions. The new National Republic developed in the Constitution could not be a true democracy, because the common folk and middling sort would be unable to make proper decisions in the interests of the nation at large and would be unaware of any candidates outside the borders of their respective states. While Congress could be vested with the responsibility of selecting the president this arrangement would develop a dependency of the executive branch upon the legislative branch, an organization that could only end in abuse of position and power. Therefore, the founders developed the Electoral College, an organization independent of Congress where gentleman electors selected in the states through a variety of means cast votes to select the gentleman executives.³² While voters still cast ballots on the day of the election, the process of which varied by state, their wishes did not have to be obeyed by the Electoral College members, who were more able to make the correct decision. In addition, “the voting public” varied by state, each making its own laws within the state constitutions to determine who was most able to make informed decisions. Restrictions were as varied as property ownership, tax payments, and church attendance, in addition to the traditional restrictions of race and gender.

³² Ibid., 210.

These truths of the electoral system in the eighteenth century are not within the popular public memory today. Most guests who visit presidential residences do not understand that they may not have been permitted to vote for these men if they lived in the eighteenth century, because they may not have been able to vote at all. They do not understand the concern that plagued the founders about providing access to the political system to those they deemed unworthy. While interest today is held in high esteem and seen as health in the political system, it was not held in the same view in the Early Republic. The political system that exists today is in fact a product of nineteenth-century reforms, the political rhetoric of historical actors such as Martin Van Buren, and the democratizing influence of the Market Revolution. The founders themselves never intended the mass democracy that exists in a modern context.

This is an essential story to tell at presidential sites. While visitors come to these sites to celebrate the founders and the founding, they do not understand what was actually founded. In the public memory, America is and has always been a place where the voice of the people is the most significant and where almost everyone has access to the political system. Interpreters at historic sites must understand their place in shaping the public memory by working at reforming civic memory. At presidential sites guests must be informed about the real political truth. Washington, Jefferson, and Adams were gentlemen, not the “common man.” Nor would they wish to be understood other than as such. These were men selected by their gentlemanly peers, not the masses. The self-interested will of the people was not the goal of the federal government or its elected members, the health of the republic was more important. Guests should also understand

that the development of the American republic was an experiment. It was not guaranteed to work, had never worked on this scale before, and was therefore not a sure thing—indeed it represented a second experiment in the wake of the failed Confederation government. Washington, Adams, and Jefferson presided over a volatile time that many Americans take for granted as safe, secure, and self-assured in the false placidity created by the passage of time. This theme about the veracity of American public memory as it relates to democracy is not typically part of the narrative at historic sites, but it must become so at presidential sites. Americans need to understand their past and their government. Guests will be receptive to this alteration in narrative, because they come to historic sites to learn more about their past and to understand their history. When they learn something new or surprising, it is more likely to stay with them after they leave the grounds. This message about the nature of American democracy, the root of American presidential power, the founding, and the founders themselves is quite new in heritage tourism and will provide a welcome change from the typical narrative about democratically ordained power supreme and the demigods who wielded it. It provides much needed context for sites that struggle to find a context that has resonance for guests. Guests appear at presidential sites because their former occupants were great men; they were powerful in their time. They are not sure why though. They know they were in a textbook, some are on coins or bills, but they do not really know why these men were important and why they are remembered. The significance and context has to go beyond the usual litany of “they were there at the founding” and evolve into something that speaks to the core of what America is and how the American republic evolved. It must

expand into why these men were at the founding and what they founded. It must acknowledge that the power vested in them was given by their peers, not “the people.” This revision of public memory will create a radically new perspective for Americans as they navigate their own modern political experiences and continue to explore their past.

Taken as a whole, presidential residences depict power in a manner that is one-sided, male focused, and overly concerned with reinforcement of the power of the nation in an uncertain period that is long past. Americans who visit these residences will come away with a better idea of the men represented, or in the case of Quincy, the family represented, and what it meant to be president in the early years of the republic. They are most likely to learn about the personal attributes that made power possible and attainable. Public historians have an opportunity with these unique sites to do extraordinary work that discusses power, relationships, and the unique character of the American republic as exemplified by those that led and created it. Unlike interpreters at lesser known sites like Stenton, where power must be established throughout the interpretive scheme to establish legitimacy and visitorship, presidential interpreters need make no such argument. The power has already been established, the challenge instead becomes making sense and bringing appreciation of what power is and how it is attained in the Early Republic. This understanding will assist Americans not just in understanding the past, but in seeing current presidential power and political discourse in a more productive and objective manner.

Chapter Two: Environment and the Everyday

During a recent visit to Colonial Williamsburg in early spring I visited the Mary Dickinson Store, a gift shop in the historic area. The shop was staffed by two female costumed employees who were selling thimbles, scissors, wool, and other reproduction sewing notions. A room at the back of the shop featured straw hats decorated with ribbons and flowers. A customer walked into the shop to look at the hats. She browsed several, tried them on, looked at the tags, and then came to the counter to ask a question she seemed quite concerned about. She asked, “Do you have any straw hats that weren’t made in China?” One of the shopkeepers replied that unfortunately no, this was their only stock of hats. The woman replied that she did not buy products from China and expected to find American goods at Colonial Williamsburg. The shopkeeper responded that during the eighteenth century the straw hats would still have come from China. The visitor turned quickly and left, a look of disbelief on her face.

This example is instructive in understanding the failings of the dominant historical narratives presented at American historic sites. The history presented attempts to explain why certain locations are notable but the narrative is limited. Guests are not encouraged to think about the United States in a global context or to consider geography as a determining factor and significant aspect to understanding historic sites. There is also a lack of presentation of the physical landscape of the eighteenth century, most prominently rivers and the Atlantic Ocean. While local interpretation is important and vital to an overall understanding of an area, guests are not encouraged to consider eighteenth-century America as part of a global community or as an area strongly

influenced by environment. A discussion of the impact of environment may seem most relevant to seventeenth-century sites of colonial North America, but it is also consequential to the development and prominence of eighteenth-century America.³³

The need for interpretation, of both local landscape and placement within the larger world, is critical as public historians work to create a narrative that alters prevailing public memory and emphasizes the importance of everyday life in early America. As it now stands, guests at heritage sites are frequently presented with a historical narrative of limited scope. Interpreters gloss over or fail to address the elements that connect sites in significant ways to a larger global narrative. Interpretations often focus instead upon what is immediate, obvious, and local. Guests are instructed in small scale narratives that encompass the site and other local landmarks. In this way, each site presents a neat package restricted by an invisible historical fence that allows docents and interpreters to tightly control the message. Once visitors leave the site, they leave that narrative behind. This approach lacks cohesion and denies guests the ability to connect narratives or tie into a larger, more encompassing thesis for the area.

In order for public history to move forward in the task of developing a more accurate, textured, and connected narrative, practitioners must work at creating something bigger than their individual subjects. Public historians should be working through their interpretation at proving a larger thesis. This thesis must be historically

³³ For further discussion of the significance of the Atlantic to American development see David Armitage, *Greater Britain, 1516-1776: Essays in Atlantic History* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004); Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Peter A. Coclanis, "Drang Nach Osten: Bernard Bailyn, the World-Island, and the Idea of Atlantic History," *Journal of World History* 13, no.1 (Spring, 2002): 169-182; and Peggy K. Liss, *Atlantic Empires: The Network of Trade and Revolution, 1713-1826* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

balanced and focused on the needs of accurate interpretation. Each site that is interpreted in this manner should further the guest's understanding of the larger historical context of eighteenth-century America, collectively altering the public memory for the better. In other words, each site is an individual document representing for guests in a tangible and visible way a vital point in a larger argument. There are many eighteenth-century themes that can be represented and argued using the sites and sources available. Each site has multiple opportunities to make these larger connections. Site elements as varied as porcelain vases, small private wharves, and slave cabins can each function as a document in a larger argument about which guests are seeking knowledge. Through the development of these larger themes there is the opportunity to develop public memory into one that considers many issues beyond individual persons and events. The goal should be to integrate the geographic environment in the form of the Atlantic and landscape contexts into historical perception.

The topic of geography is one that is not well represented at heritage sites, but is perhaps one of the most significant topics for contextualizing eighteenth-century sites. The British North American colonies, and later the new nation of the United States, were part of an Atlantic community. The Atlantic community was a meaningful part of the everyday life of every person living in the colonies, whether consciously or not. It allowed them to buy and sell, to obtain goods and labor, and provided them with news, ideas, and influences that shaped their lives. The placement of the colonies along ocean frontage was no accident. Settlement patterns in the colonies were deliberate and can be traced easily by following the local waterways. The best locations for settlement were

along waterways because of access to transportation and thereby communication and trade. These ideas seem obvious to public historians, but might be foreign to guests living in a modern sense where geography does not represent such boundaries. The significance of the landscape to settlement, commerce, the success of the colonies, even the revolutionary movement, are commonly considered lesser themes in the narrative as compared to biographical sketches and power narratives. This is ironic considering the instrumental nature of geography in developing power and influence in the period.

Modern Americans consider themselves part of a global community. Technology, transportation, clothing, and services are provided to Americans from countries around the world. However, many are ignorant as to when this global influence began. They might place it sometime around 1898 or even 1914, but it is unlikely that they would think to place it in the eighteenth century. Americans who visit historic sites of the eighteenth century are seeking what they consider a simpler time. They are looking for a world that has a slower pace and a different feel from their own. They do not stop to consider the similarities of the past and the present. Heritage sites more typically emphasize contrast than comparison in the hope that startling difference will cause inquiry and information retention. However, one can argue that similar results can be obtained through surprising similarity.

Visitors must be encouraged to consider the Atlantic community of the eighteenth century and the implications of colonial presence within the British Empire. For some guests, this transition will be challenging to grasp at first as these ideas about the British nature of American colonists are contrary to popular memory. Children are

taught from a young age that colonists did not like the British; they were dissatisfied with the taxes and lack of freedoms, so they wanted out of the colonial arrangement. Typically primary and secondary school instruction does not include the benefits of empire or why it took so long for independence to be strongly desired by a significant minority. As adults, Americans retain this belief in a narrative of simpler times and the virtues of American freedom. They do not consider the larger picture, then, because it typically has not been shown to them. Since many Americans get their history from historic sites and museums, these are the locations where public memory can and must be altered.

Public history has done well in many areas in the past thirty years to catch up with more recent historical trends. Many of these changes were wrought in response to the increasing prominence of social history; a history “from the ground up.” It is time for public history to change again to incorporate a greater Atlantic context and understand the importance of the ocean to power, planning, and transportation. The influence of the Atlantic begins as early as the seventeenth century in the British American colonies. However, in interpreting the eighteenth century these issues become more consequential and are essential to addressing the place of British North America and later the United States as part of a larger international empire, rather than a destination unto itself. The idea that American colonists identified themselves as citizens of an independent location throughout the colonial period is common to many historic sites in the former British North American colonies. This presentation is not fruitful and does not challenge guests to consider the true status of the British North American colonies, or their identification as members of the British Empire up to at least 1767, and for some, through and beyond

1776. This alteration in the narrative, alone, will not only be new to many visitors, but will over time develop a substantial alteration in the public memory and consideration of the period. It will allow guests to re-evaluate everything they thought they understood about the eighteenth century and the cause of American freedom.

Even sites that portray life between 1780 and 1800 must emphasize the importance of the British Empire, including goods and cultural influences. Public memory over time has dictated that after Independence, Americans eschewed all things British and proceeded to live their everyday lives free from the influence of the oppressor. This is not fully accurate. While a suspicion and distaste for items and ideas that seemed uniquely British remained for many years in the Early Republic, Americans could not fully divorce themselves from British influences that had become deeply ingrained in their culture, nor could they disconnect from the Atlantic community. The culture of tea is an instructive example that uses the lives of ordinary Americans to make larger points about the true nature of the United States after Independence. For example, guests at heritage sites are frequently instructed in parlors or dining halls that in the eighteenth century Americans drank tea from porcelain or silver tea services and stored it in blue and white porcelain containers. This presentation is meant to both introduce the tradition of American tea drinking and to introduce an unfamiliar item of material culture. Looking at the presentation from an Atlantic perspective, it is shown to be limited in scope. Due to the lack of appropriate context, it gives the impression that all Americans used porcelain for tea drinking and storage, and that this was a purely American phenomena. It would be more appropriate to argue that Americans drank tea because of

their British heritage, in which tea drinking was prominent. To further the Atlantic context, it is essential to point out that porcelain was an imported commodity from China which came to America because of its place within a large maritime empire. The American interest in British fashion also contributed to the prevalence of porcelain within American homes. Again, the problem is one of context. Developing the context of a site in the Atlantic landscape throughout the narrative must be as important as the context in the local historical landscape. The remedy to issues of context is consistency and commitment to developing narratives that are more historically accurate and challenge traditional ideas of eighteenth-century life.³⁴

The current treatment of the Atlantic context varies by location. The best heritage tourism experiences of the eighteenth-century Atlantic context exist in New England. The maritime heritage of the region has led to a positive emphasis being placed upon the place of the ocean as a means of livelihood. On Boston walking tours, guides point out the importance of the ocean for ship building and merchant schemes. They are also diligent in the creation of a narrative that encourages guests to consider the number of Boston's inhabitants that relied upon the port in one way or another for their livelihood. When discussing the impending Revolution, the use of the Boston Port Act and the relative depopulation of the city because of the lack of economic opportunity is a significant moment for guests to consider the Atlantic and its importance.³⁵ These

³⁴ For more information on tea-drinking in America see: Rodris Roth, "Tea-Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: its Etiquette and Equipage" in Robert Blair St. George, ed., *Material Life in America, 1600-1860* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988): 439-462.

³⁵ The Freedom Trail, a walking tour of the city of Boston that includes significant historic sites for understanding the Revolutionary story includes significant Atlantic context. This is most evident in the

connections are possible because of the commitment to developing an appropriate context. It is successful because it alters the way that visitors previously conceived of the Revolutionary struggle in Boston. By developing an Atlantic context during the early stages of the tour and then expanding on the context by showing its influence in the lives of typical Bostonians, interpreters are able to make more meaningful connections for guests. The existing understanding of Boston's revolutionary struggle within the public memory references only the struggle of merchants and the availability of luxury goods such as fine textiles. Making a connection to the struggles of everyday people as they struggle for their very livelihood during a difficult economic and political period creates greater resonance for guests and alters the way they conceive of this revolutionary moment.³⁶

The National Park Service in their interpretation of Salem Maritime National Historic Site has amplified the Atlantic context by connecting the town of Salem not just to the bounty of the ocean, but to the ability of the ocean to connect Salem to the rest of the Atlantic economy and the world at large. The site functions as a historic district, a contiguous collection of structures encompassing several building types including residential and commercial structures, warehouses, ships, and lighthouses that contribute to the greater maritime context. The site's interpretive brochure explains that "The

non-profit Freedom Trail walking tour led by the Freedom Trail Organization and to a lesser extent in the National Park Service walking tour of the area.

³⁶ For greater discussion of Atlantic commerce during the eighteenth century see: John J. McCusker and Russel R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Edwin J. Perkins, *The Economy of Colonial America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); and Jacob M. Price "The Imperial Economy, 1700-1776," in P.J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol 2, *The Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 78-104.

wharves ... stretch out into Salem Harbor, testifying to the city's former dependence on the sea. Once – busy wharves and buildings facing the harbor are remnants of the shipping industry that prospered in Massachusetts Bay's oldest seaport well into the 1800s.”³⁷ Guests are confronted with the Atlantic context from the very start. And as the brochure points out, the orientation of the district reinforces this context; the residential and commercial structures face the sea because it was the center of livelihood and power in the town. In addition to this explanation, the interpretive brochure includes a map indicating Salem's connection to world markets and place within the lucrative Caribbean trade. This moves beyond a discussion of the Triangle Trade and considers Salem's global position based on its Atlantic location. While this should be expected at a location that claims to be “maritime” in nature, the context is carried beyond the obvious maritime structures and into residential sites. Defying the typical interpretation of residential sites owned by Atlantic merchants, whose tours focus upon wealth accumulated exotic goods collected, the maritime residences in Salem never lose sight of the sea. This is quite literal; the sea can never be forgotten as the façades face the ocean, which docents use to make greater points about the connection to the sea. Residences such as the Derby House within the Salem Maritime Historical Site reinforce the Atlantic context through their interpretation, making strong points for guests to consider in support of the larger maritime narrative.

Docents at the Derby House explain the significance of cod to the Caribbean sugar islands, the way that merchant empires were constructed and managed, and the

³⁷ Salem Maritime National Historic Site, “Touring the Site” (Washington D.C.: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Reprint 2009).

manifestations of worldwide shipping prominence in household furnishings. The Derby house is a single component of the larger context of the Salem Maritime Historic Site. Overall, the site has a clear overarching thesis and uses historic records, interpretive films, material culture, architecture, and even ships as documents to support their larger argument, that the Atlantic made Salem a significant and prosperous American location recognizable on the world market into the nineteenth century. This strong historic experience dovetails effectively with the message conveyed by the Salem visitor center and available in their guidebook, *Touring Companion & Guide to the Four Historic Faces of Salem, Massachusetts*. Salem's maritime history is identified as one of four "historic faces" of the area. Guests are encouraged to explore the four faces—Witchcraft, Maritime, Architecture, and Nathaniel Hawthorne and also to understand how each overlaps with the others. Each "face" has a brief introduction that introduces a theme that can then be explored through interaction with historic sites. The guide also provides suggestions for reading and research. This approach encourages guests to understand that history is not isolated but effusive.³⁸

Unfortunately, the New England experience of the Atlantic context is an exception rather than a rule. While New Englanders were not the only colonial residents to prosper based on their Atlantic location or create an economy largely dependent upon it, they are the only region that typically makes the Atlantic context a priority in heritage interpretation. Historian Phyllis Leffler explains that the suppression of the Atlantic as a

³⁸ William Story, *Touring Companion and Guide to the Four Historic Faces of Salem, Massachusetts* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Willart Publishing, 1995), 1. This guidebook is encouraged by Salem Visitor Center staff and sold in their gift shop. It is not a free publication, but it is less than five dollars, making it very accessible.

significant aspect of development is due to an American tendency to recognize the frontier as key to their development rather than the sea.³⁹ Each of the former thirteen colonies can point to the significance of the Atlantic in their development. In a seventeenth-century context the sea functioned for the planting of roots and development of a growing and relatively secure colony. In an eighteenth-century context the sea was vital for the development of commercial interests and wealth, providing an impetus for American Independence toward the end of the century. Interpretation at locations such as Charleston, South Carolina, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, locations closely tied to the ocean and dependent upon the wealth generated from it, fail to interpret in large part the significance of this fact. This skewed history leads dedicated heritage tourists to come away with a cumulative idea that the Atlantic was only critical to the history of New England and no other region.

The Atlantic context of the British American colonies in the eighteenth century is easily identified in documents from the period. Even within the limited collections of individual historic sites, it is evident that America could not exist without the Atlantic connection—at least not in a way that would have been satisfactory to colonists themselves. Many collections of eighteenth-century documents contain accounts from merchants and the diaries and letters of ordinary men and women discussing Atlantic traffic in a variety of contexts.⁴⁰ By the eighteenth century, ships were routinely coming into port full of goods from around the empire that were popular and needed in the

³⁹ Phyllis Leffler, “Peopling the Portholes: National Identity and Maritime Museums in the U.S. and U.K.”, *Public Historian* 26 (Autumn 2004): 27.

⁴⁰ For an example of this correspondence see: Kate Chedzoy, *Women’s Writing in the British Atlantic World: Memory, Place, and History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

colonies. Extant receipts and ledgers list purchases for entire families, necessary goods for everyday life, dependent upon the Atlantic trade. Colonists imported a variety of goods foodstuffs such as sugar, spices, and alcohol. Textiles such as fine cottons, silks, and wools were also popular. Building materials such as glass or paint were necessary to creating a style of living based on British precedent. Even leisure and luxury goods such as needles, books, and fine porcelain were routine purchases from the Atlantic trade. Eighteenth-century heritage sites are furnished with these items, either originals or reproductions, but do not make full or accurate use of them. The material culture interpreted at heritage sites represents goods that were not produced in the colonies, a fact that should be readily evident to guests. The American colonies did not possess a domestic manufactory for lacquerware or true porcelain in the eighteenth century; these goods were imported from Asia constantly. Guests to eighteenth-century sites will remain ignorant of this fact unless educated. Material culture is a significant aspect of interpretation at heritage sites but frequently these artifacts are expected to stand alone. Material culture must be used not only to make useful analogies to eighteenth-century everyday life, but to connect that life to a greater context. They can be an important aspect for guests of understanding life within a mercantilist empire. This is a missed opportunity to make a dramatic change to public memory.

A change in the use of material culture within heritage sites is essential to alteration of narrative, context, and public memory. Items of material culture such as furniture, textiles, and decorative arts are the elements of everyday life that guests seek and understand in the most tangible manner on tours. These items are looked for,

appreciated, and can instigate inquiry and understanding in ways that conversation or lecture cannot. Guests who are visual learners require the use of material culture items to fully embrace the narrative and larger context. Many sites currently do not use material culture to its highest potential. The place of material culture in a historic residence or business is distinct from the placement of the identical item in a museum gallery. Material culture housed in galleries is meant for individual appreciation and is provided with exhibit labels to provide information. Within a historic site, material culture items are documents to be used in a larger argument; they are key elements in the education process and provide supporting evidence for the narrative. The development of the Atlantic context as a consistent aspect of eighteenth-century interpretation can largely be achieved through the effective use of material culture to assist guests in making larger and more challenging connections to the Atlantic theme.⁴¹

Material culture is an effective medium with which to introduce the Atlantic context to guests. Again, as these are items that can create a connection to everyday life, they are particularly powerful. A useful example can be found in eighteenth-century sewing tables which were frequently used by eighteenth-century women, an item that is found in many residential sites. A sewing table was historically full of goods from the Atlantic trade. Through its use women were engaging in an activity that was both fashionable and proper according to ladies magazines and politeness books, most of which came through the British trade. This practice continued to be influenced by British

⁴¹ For further discussion of Eighteenth-century material culture see: Robert Blair St. George, ed., *Material Life in America 1600-1860* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988); Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992); and Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, ed., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth-Century* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1994).

fashion throughout the eighteenth century. Such pieces of furniture speak volumes about the influence of the Atlantic in everyday American life. It provides an excellent venue for a larger discussion. Much as in the earlier example of tea drinking, the explanation of this one item can dramatically alter guest experience if examined effectively. The sewing table provides the opportunity to discuss feminine education, the availability of leisure time, and economic status. The challenge of alteration in material culture is expanding efficiently on simple object identification. While visitors will expect the docent to identify the function of the table and its status within the residence, it is unlikely they will be expecting more. This unexpected expansion in basic interpretation creates an important connection to a larger context about the residence and its inhabitants. Guests must be challenged in order to immerse themselves in these new ideas that are unfamiliar to their traditional understanding. Material culture represents an opportunity to expand horizons, to ensure that guests understand that “things” are not just “things.” Material culture contained in historic sites offer important moments with which to connect to larger context and thereby alter public memory and understanding of the everyday life of eighteenth-century Americans.

In addition to the use artifacts such as sewing tables and tea services within historic residences as teaching tools, documents from the collections of the site or from other local sites can also be used to reinforce the Atlantic context. Many historic sites have begun to incorporate images of primary source documents to reinforce ideas or challenge guests to think outside of the meta-narrative. Frequently these documents are letters or short notes that include a famous signature or describe an important event.

Many archives have examples of documents that can be shown to guests to reinforce the place of the Atlantic trade in everyday life. Newspaper advertisements that announce a new ship's arrival and her cargo could be instructive. Sites that are attached to a specific person or family could include lists of goods purchased from merchants or requests made by ladies of the household for certain goods at significant port towns or even requests made of those traveling to England. Even at historic sites where guests are required to stay behind a velvet rope and refrain from touching artifacts, a document reproduction is something that can be handled, examined, and considered individually, becoming a tangible and powerful tool in presenting a larger argument. There are many material culture items that can function in this way, connecting everyday life and goods to a larger, more comprehensive picture.

As many historians have noted, it was not only goods that were traveling the Atlantic in the eighteenth century. Ideas and news flowed easily as well. These elements should also be a considerable portion of eighteenth-century interpretation. While a discussion of Enlightenment arguments might be a little heavy for many guests, it is not out of the question to encourage greater consideration of the influence English ideas on American culture. This moves beyond the idea that many colonial families came from England and brought their culture with them, which is really more appropriate to a seventeenth-century discussion. By the eighteenth century, many colonists were native born and had begun to develop a syncretic Atlantic culture encompassing ideas from England, Africa, and the Caribbean. This exchange of ideas was readily found in newspapers, letters, and books. Colonial American newspapers of the eighteenth century

carried largely Atlantic news from across the empire, with a limited amount of local information beyond what would today be called classifieds. Eighteenth-century letters frequently discuss the comings and goings of ships, guests, and goods from ports. The importation of books and pamphlets from England on a variety of topics began in the seventeenth century and continued through the eighteenth century. Guests should be aware of this cultural exchange as a way to understand the place of the American colonies in a realistic way.

Cultural exchange represents an important opportunity to improve eighteenth-century interpretation. This is not a topic that guests consider actively when engaging in heritage tourism. Current tours do not typically include substantive discussion of the significance of Atlantic cultural exchange. This discussion could be highly useful in developing tours that engage interest by causing interaction with everyday themes. Consider the topic of boyhood education as a point of inquiry. Many historic sites along the Atlantic coast make some mention of male children traveling to England for educational purposes. Still others include mention of the “grand tour” without context, assuming understanding among guests who are typically unfamiliar with the concept. Other sites mention boys who completed their transition into manhood in the Caribbean learning about plantation agriculture or beginning a political career. While all of these instances of education for male children are mentioned, none is typically discussed in detail. Because the information is given without context and a greater point is not made, guests may assume that it represents a less significant detail that has little bearing on their overall experience. This assumption is reinforced by the greater emphasis placed on other

elements of the tour such as wealth and power, which ignores the purpose of the education—to gain and/or retain access to wealth and power.⁴²

At Mount Pleasant, a historic residence in the Fairmount Park district of Philadelphia, one docent in pointing out a portrait of a young man to guests made the comment that the subject had traveled to the Caribbean after his schooling in England to manage properties. When questioned why, the docent explained that the family had property there. In this instance, both the question and response are instructive. The question by the guest indicates an interest in information that was unusual or surprising. The guest was intrigued by both the fact that the boy went to school in England, but also perplexed as to the boy's final trip to the Caribbean. These are both ideas related to Atlantic connections and cultural exchange, concepts that are not typically covered thoroughly in eighteenth-century residences. This guest was interested because the information being presented was contrary to preconceived ideas about eighteenth century life. When they heard about something different, it caused a moment of interest and inquiry, which is a desirable outcome during a tour. The docent's response missed an opportunity to provide context and connections to the audience. The response was the simplest way to answer the question and the easiest response for guests to understand, but it was a definitive response that did not encourage further questioning or bring the guests to a greater understanding of larger ideas. While this example displays an unfortunate approach to the Atlantic context, it is also one that is typical to many heritage sites. This example illustrates readily available opportunities to begin this larger discussion and

⁴² For more information on eighteenth-century child-rearing see: James Marten, ed., *Children in Colonial America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

guest interest in the complexities of the historical narrative. The Atlantic context must be integrated into the narrative at heritage sites of all types, even residential properties, because it is crucial to understanding even the most basic family history of the eighteenth-century. Currently, most interpreters consider this context periphery information that is not vital to the primary narrative, which precludes it from serious discussion in tours.⁴³ However, these types of connections, which reveal everyday life in the eighteenth century and a family dynamic, are the most though provoking and exciting for guests.

The subject of education is a key opportunity to introduce the Atlantic context because of its predominance in eighteenth-century families and the fact that most heritage sites address multiple generations. Guests are intrigued by information that reflects everyday life in a manner that can be easily compared to their own experience. The subject of child rearing fulfills these needs. Unfortunately, education is currently not presented as a significant subject. Interpreters are perhaps reluctant to acknowledge foreign education, particularly boarding school education. The reasons behind this omission are likely that tours focus on prominent residents and their interactions with specific sites. Off site education is not related to the actual site itself and represents such a brief period in a lifetime that it is easily set aside. It is likely also part of a larger trend of trivializing British influence and keeping its discussion at a minimum, in favor of a narrative focused on the local, the domestic, the American. An acknowledgement of the

⁴³ Mount Pleasant is in the process of creating a new interpretive plan that takes into greater account the maritime history of its former owners. As it currently stands, interpreters have recently included a “captain’s study” to introduce the interpreted owner’s oceanic interests and docents discuss the Scottish origins of the residential architecture, but no overarching theme on Atlantic context is present.

place of the Atlantic in American education is an admission that Americans were dependent upon Europe for this basic need so essential for gentlemen and statesmen. The reliance on British education for the upper class, the idea that a European tour is essential for a good education, and the place of the Caribbean in patronage and later education for planters and others seems does not fit easily within purely “American” and largely local narratives. It also does not dovetail well with public memory.

Discussion of the influence of the British on education, why it happened, and why it was sought after for the children of the elite—male and female in some locations—presents a suggestion that maybe perhaps colonial America had to offer was not good enough for the wealthy. One popular Atlantic view of the colonies from the outside world in the early eighteenth-century was that it was a cultural backwater. This is not a part of American cultural memory. While this perceived lack of civility was railed against by the gentry, it did not stop them from obtaining education for themselves and for their children abroad. America’s lack of educational opportunities transcended a lack of luxury goods such as silk and fine horses, which could be imported in time. It indicated a different type of dissatisfaction with America. British North America lacked the thorough educational and intellectual environment required for a life lived within a larger empire. Americans lived in conversation with an Atlantic world which required certain knowledge both practical and polite that elites could not obtain for their children in the colonies. It also indicates that learning in England was not just superior, its availability and acquisition was a mark of wealth and status. The omission of these ideas at historic sites when compared to their inclusion in the scholarly literature indicates an

unwillingness or inability to engage in ideas that are contrary to American public memory of the colonial period. Such ideas present a challenge for those who are seeking a narrative of American superiority.

While not all historic sites must carry with them a world history overview, the inclusion of this context at many sites is essential to an overall understanding of the presented themes. If every site incorporated a more correct context that included just a few moments to place the site into perspective, guests would eventually begin to integrate this into their larger idea of America history, thereby altering public memory. Public historians seek to preserve and promote understanding and education. This cannot be fulfilled with a narrative that is limited to a one dimensional history that is shortsighted and local. To be sure, the Atlantic context will fit differently in each location and narratives should be constructed to create an appropriate treatment of this topic, one that seamlessly leads guests into considering the site and American history in a larger way.

The integration of a larger context will also assist guests in retention of information. Guest retention is a significant problem for interpreters who struggle to make tours that are relatable and memorable. This problem could be attributed to narratives that do not make broad enough connections to create meaningful impressions. The information that is frequently retained at historic sites is typically either smaller points that connect to the lives of guests—everyday history—or answer specific questions guests have. For example, why do we say “sleep tight?” This question is frequently answered at eighteenth-century sites and guests take it home with them as a mental souvenir because it answered a question they already had. Guests retain

information that answers questions in their minds and makes connections to existing ideas or confusions they already have. The Atlantic context can fill in many gaps in the minds of modern Americans, assisting in retention and expanding the educational experience. Rather than deal with chronology, guests respond well to stories that are complete and answer the potential “whys.” Leaving out the Atlantic context leaves questions in the minds of guests. These questions are dismissed as unimportant because they are not addressed in the narrative. In truth, they are an important aspect to narrative retention. In addition to a desire to see questions answered, guests also seek new information. They want docents to introduce them to ideas or topics that they had not previously considered in a historical perspective. The creation of a tour that challenges public memory and encourages inquiry and comparison to modern standards will aid in overall guest retention.

Consider as an example an eighteenth-century printing press demonstration—a typical living history installation. Guests go into the printing office, see a gargantuan press with men laboring over it, and are frequently handed a sheet right from it. This sample sheet usually includes news about the heritage site and period of interpretation in an extremely local way. Frequently the issues addressed are those of concern to the colonies in the period of interpretation, such as Stamp Act. Consider the reaction if interpreters handed someone the news of the day and it reported a new shipment of slaves on the way from Africa, a piracy incident in Barbados, or the latest items for discussion in the British Parliament. The guest’s first question would be, why? Why are you printing news from all these places in the local printing office? The response opens up a whole

new conversation about news, what people were interested in, and why. It also allows for connections to be made to the modern local paper which also includes news from other places. Ultimately, guests would be left with the impression that this “simpler time” was not as simple or different as they initially imagined. This is a much more informative conversation, and one that is more likely to stay with guests than a discussion that focuses only on how heavy the press was or the age of apprenticeship. Both of these conversations must occur simultaneously because it challenges what guests thought they understood, and introduces them to aspects of the trade they never considered or were never exposed to previously.

There are some locations and demonstrations that attempt to teach the Atlantic context in smaller-scale exhibitions, but these are the exception rather than the rule. At Colonial Williamsburg a living history installment on the rearing of sheep on the site is a good illustration of significant and meaningful use of a larger context to help guests think differently about issues in the colonial period. In this demonstration, women sit at looms, spinning wheels, and on chairs carding wool. The interpreters in this location discuss a variety of noteworthy issues with regard to textile production and the mercantile economy. They begin by discussing wool and the rules against importation of sheep in the colonial period. This opens up a larger discussion of what it means to be in an empire, the economic interests of Britain, the significance of imports. There is also mention of colonists and smuggling, an issue almost never addressed at historic sites. This conversation then leads into two others, both important to guests. The first concerns sheep. If sheep were illegal in the eighteenth century, why are they currently roaming the

fields around Williamsburg? The second leads into a discussion of homespun and domestic textile production. Here again, guests are encouraged to think about the fine imported cotton available through trade as compared to the rather rough domestic textiles of varying fibers that could be created at home. Interaction with a relatively small exhibit on textile production has now opened guests up to thinking about the place of America as part of an empire. It also assists them in understanding what it really meant in the Revolutionary period for people to switch to homespun as a means of protest. This is to say nothing of the value of understanding the actual work of domestic textile production, which itself is fascinating.

Opening up the conversation at historic sites to include American colonists or American citizens as members of an Atlantic community forces guests to see outside of the sometimes rigid and localist strictures of public memory and consider Africa and the Caribbean in a way that they likely have not before. Both African and the West Indies struggle to find their voice in the making of America yet were highly influential at the time. The Caribbean influence in particular is one that receives little respect in historic site interpretation and is not considered a significant aspect at most locations in the crafting of a narrative. This is an unfortunate tradition that has been in place for many years. Even post-secondary history textbooks have been slow in the incorporation of the British Caribbean colonies as critical factors in the North American colonial endeavor.

The real tragedy of this omission is that the success of the North American colonies is based largely on connection to the Caribbean during the late seventeenth century and through the eighteenth century. Sadly, this context is absent at most historic

sites. Most Americans do not consider Barbados, Jamaica, or Antigua as part of the British Atlantic colonies. The Caribbean colonies seem to have been written out of American history when they opted out of the struggle for independence. Their influence on and connection to the North American colonies should not be ignored. The typical interaction of guests with a Caribbean context is the identification of West Indian materials in household goods or, as in the previous case of Mount Pleasant, identification of a family member who lived or died in the islands. Guests do not routinely question the insertion of the Caribbean as out of the ordinary, but they also are not receiving any broader understanding from its mention. Including the Caribbean narrative where appropriate is essential to leading the public into a better understanding of the nature of the American colonies, the indispensability and profitability of trade, and the idea that an independent America could be economically sound.

* * * *

The prominence of America's river system with regard to settlement and development in the eighteenth century is as under-represented as the Atlantic context. The failure of many historic sites to take advantage of the landscape and create an interpretation that incorporates this important feature creates a problematic understanding of the built environment among visitors. By limiting the context of landscape in interpreting the eighteenth century, interpreters leave guests to consider heritage locations in a modern context, basing their understanding on modern notions of landscape. Today, riverfront property is desirable for views and water sports. But historically, the river was vital, above all to commerce and communication. Interpretation of the landscape must be

integrated into narratives at historic sites to present a history that does not just depend upon permanent structures for context. Landscape was a primary determinant in eighteenth-century planning. The challenges and possibilities inherent in landscape interpretation can be best understood by analyzing river interpretation in two significant eighteenth-century landscapes, the James River in Virginia and the Ashley River in South Carolina.

Visitors to eighteenth-century riverfront properties are encouraged to experience and understand the fruits of the river system, but rarely the significance of the river itself. Many river sites have considerable visual impact with grounds including stately homes and large parcels of land. More than any other geographic feature, the remnants of America's great families exist on the river systems of today. However, in visiting these sites guests are only brought into contact with the great families and the residential construction associated with them. They learn about architects, some decorative arts, and family history, but the narrative is confined to these points. Interpretation of landscape is typically a land based concern, only addressed in a heritage context when considering sites, such as battlefields, whose historical significance is more obviously landscape oriented. The significance of landscape to residences, particularly rivers, is frequently overlooked in interpretation. A greater connection must be made between the prosperity of the eighteenth-century and the influence of the river system for guests. The insertion of landscape into the public memory as a primary force in the creation of American success in the eighteenth-century will develop new avenues of understanding and exploration.

It is the responsibility of interpreters at river sites to develop a narrative that encourages consideration of the landscape. Visitors should understand that before the interstate highway system or railroads were the primary means of transportation and commerce, the river systems served this function. The historical context provided by the river system is not confined to the eighteenth century, but its success as a conveyor of people, goods, and information during the period allowed the nation to grow and flourish. Interpreters crafting riverfront site narratives should include the natural features of the landscape to help expand understanding of the larger historical narrative. America in the eighteenth century was dependent upon the river system for wealth and growth. Eighteenth-century settlement patterns clung to the river system because rivers were essential to American survival and prosperity. Public historians cannot hope to instill a greater understanding of American history and life into the consciousness of heritage tourists until they are willing to interpret a narrative that encompasses not just buildings but the landscape as a historical document worthy of interpretation.

Opening up the narrative to include the landscape creates new avenues of exploration and discussion. Many heritage tours begin outside of a residence, on a porch or on a lawn. Integrating the landscape at this moment is a natural transition. Questions can be asked that set the stage for the tour and encourage guests to begin thinking in a different way before they proceed into a residence or outbuilding. Introducing landscape features from the outset encourages guests to be mindful of it as they tour. The landscape, then, transcends its place as a means to access the museum house, it becomes a primary location of historical context. In the case of riverfront residences, the river will often be

visible from inside the residence, which will typically have an entrance on the river frontage. Interpreters can encourage guests to consider the significance of this landscape feature to the residents. In the case of a river like the Ashley or James, interpreters have the opportunity to demonstrate how this aspect of the landscape created the wealth that built the residence. Guests frequently inquire as to what features are original to a site or residence. They feel that these original elements are the most important because they are the most authentic. While guests are expecting original residences or material culture examples, the landscape can fulfill the same purpose. The river, as an original feature that cannot be removed, despite environmental changes over time, should be one of the historic features that are pointed out to guests as a key element to the overall context of the site narrative. Consideration of the historical landscape is a new theme to consider for many heritage tourists. The impact of its introduction has the potential to change public memory, and alter the experience at all other heritage sites by developing larger contexts and opportunities for greater educational experiences.

Visitors to historic sites rarely consider the landscape as a meaningful aspect of the overall experience. At best considered scenery and at worst posing a nuisance, the siting, location, and physical features of the historic residence are rarely considered as something worthy of note. Heritage tourists are most likely to consider the landscape as scenery with no substantial historical importance unless the site was a battlefield at one time. They may appreciate the retention of green space around the site as a way to isolate and preserve quiet, or admire well-tended gardens, but the influence of the environment itself on what they see is not usually on the top of their list of items to consider.

Interpreters reinforce this oversight by largely ignoring the landscape as a determining factor in the overall experience. Such omission must be remedied. Guests who do not appreciate the landscape beyond the aesthetic are not just missing an aesthetic experience but missing a considerable aspect of the historical narrative.

When considering the physical landscape of the eighteenth century, one of the most significant physical features was the river system. The extensive river system on the Atlantic coast was one element that made seventeenth-century settlement in the area attractive. Moreover, the river system allowed many colonies to thrive and provided important connections between agricultural and merchant areas. A number of extant historic sites remain along the major arteries of the eighteenth century, particularly the James, Ashley, and Delaware Rivers. Successful merchants and planters needed access to these rivers to export and import goods and resources. They were also the most reliable means for transportation in some areas where roads were unreliable and difficult. Many of the great eighteenth-century cities were constructed to take advantage of the great American rivers they were sited along, such as Richmond, Charleston, and Philadelphia. In addition, many of the great families located their dwellings on the great rivers; these residences are among the most popular of heritage tourism destinations today. However, rivers are not being used to their full potential at eighteenth-century historic sites. Visitors should be encouraged to understand the significance of the river system to the locations they are visiting. In addition, opportunities should be made available to experience the rivers in a historic way.

Interpretation of the James River landscape is representative of the essential problem of historic landscape interpretation. The landscape is largely ignored or used only for guest recreation; it is not a meaningful interpretive aspect of the historic sites along its banks. Docents do not refer to it and guests are encouraged to look but not to understand. Indeed, the river becomes the least important aspect of the site, even though it may be one of the most intact and significant resources available. Despite its historic stature, the James River, for example, consistently receives less interpretation than excavations or site recreations. Two historic sites along the James River landscape exemplify this issue with relation to the eighteenth century, Shirley Plantation and Berkeley Plantation. Both sites are privately owned and operated, both physically include the river on the site, but neither interprets the landscape.⁴⁴

Berkeley Plantation is a good example of a historic residence with a number of excellent resources including frontage on the James River that does not take advantage of its physical location. Berkeley is advertised as the birthplace and home of William Henry Harrison. Additionally, Berkeley is also contextualized as the location of Harrison's Landing, an important location of the Seven Days battles of the Civil War. Finally, Berkeley presents itself as the location of the first Thanksgiving in American history. Visitors to Berkeley are greeted by a number of historical claims contained within a very confused narrative, which fails to take advantage of the obvious focal point of the site, the river. Berkeley is presented as a nineteenth-century residence with a mix of family

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the Atlantic connection to the landscape of early Virginia see: Peter C. Mancall, *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

furnishings contextualized by an ineffective narrative. The grounds are relatively uninterrupted with the exception a provided visitor map. The map of the grounds shows the many locations to be explored by guests. The first stop for many is the basement of the house, which includes a film presentation on the significance of the plantation and its origins. This film focuses on the importance of the land itself, almost as a sacred site. The film argues that the land itself was precious, but in reality it was the river that made the land so important, a point that is largely missed at the site. Indeed, Berkeley consistently misses the opportunity to make larger connections related to the landscape, connections which could enhance the context and narrative of the site.

The two most notable aspects of Berkeley Plantation, Harrison's Landing and the James River, are not interpreted. They are absent when they should be the primary focus in establishing the narrative and significance of the site. Native American peoples resided on the site first due to its proximity to the river. English explorers landed at the site while exploring the James River and its potential. Interpreters at Berkeley refer to documents from this party as evidence of the first Thanksgiving, which does not account for the larger significance of the event. This was an early identification by European settlers of Harrison's Landing as an important outpost and the James River as a viable waterway for commerce. It was because of these landscape features that the settlers justified the massacre of the Indians and farms were constructed eventually evolving into the eighteenth-century tobacco plantation known as Berkeley. General McClellan used Harrison's Landing as a supply station during the Civil War and to retreat after the Seven Days' battles because the river allowed his forces an avenue of return to Washington

D.C.. The Harrisons had a successful plantation in large part because of their access to the river and markets, and would likely have been important liaisons for lesser planters who did not have river access, lending to their power in the region. Berkeley Plantation was a significant outpost on the James River throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century because of Harrison's Landing and the significance of the river to the local economy. But this is a critical context not presented to guests for their consideration or understanding.

Berkeley was home to Benjamin Harrison, a prominent statesman of the eighteenth century whose residence occupied an important location on the James. Interpreters have selected William Henry Harrison as the most significant former resident of Berkeley and have created a narrative that addresses the site as a presidential birthplace and nineteenth-century home. This decision was likely made to draw in visitors seeking to explore sites of presidential power in Virginia like Mount Vernon or Monticello. By casting itself as a site associated with the presidency, Berkeley is assured that guests will visit seeking the type of connection to the past that has been addressed previously. Despite the nineteenth-century presidential connection, the eighteenth-century context appears, based on location and extant resources, to be the best option for interpretation. Benjamin Harrison was able to garner respect and wealth because of the river. His location at this place meant something; it made a statement to his peers and dependents. This aspect of the site is not part of the narrative. The river is also not interpreted, although there is a dock and it is prominently visible from the majority of the grounds and the windows of the residence. At one time, a replica eighteenth-century

merchant ship was set up at Harrison's Landing, which could have been a symbolic element to inspire understanding of the landscape context. Unfortunately, a hurricane removed the ship from interpretation and it has not been replaced. The loss of the ship is unfortunate because Harrison's Landing is an ideal location for interpreters to discuss gentility, the importance of the river to tobacco shipment, the luxury goods trade, and the association between location and power. The power of Benjamin Harrison is currently only displayed in a few sentences about his political career. The opportunity to create real understanding about the connection between wealth, power, and landscape exists at Berkeley, but it is not exploited.

The true narrative issue at Berkeley is that guests are encouraged to think on a small scale. The message at the site is that the land is significant, that the house is intact, and that the objects contained within are fine antiques. This narrative is quite limited, it does not challenge, question, or inspire. The portion of the residence and grounds currently open to the public is small; therefore interpreters need to be more creative to expand the experience beyond four walls. Guests at locations on the James River should be encouraged to think big in the way that eighteenth-century planters did. For planters on the James River wealth was real, power was accessible. They were representatives of gentility and benevolence, the sky was the limit with access to power born of a river plantation. The small-scale interpretation at Berkeley does not encourage thought or questioning in this manner. The site exudes a sense of isolation without relevant connection to other James River locations and families despite the abundance of extant plantations in the area. Guests should be given appropriate context and be encouraged to

see a bigger picture at Berkeley; they would then have the ability to understand the true significance of the site in a manner that the current narrative does not convey. If interpreters were to use the landscape to create a new and unexpected experience, then they could create a tour with impact and interest. This is a common shortcoming of other sites on the James River, too.

Just down the river from Berkeley is Shirley Plantation. Shirley suffers from many of the same landscape problems exhibited by Berkeley. Although the interpreters at Shirley think in larger terms than at Berkeley as regards narrative, they still do not include the river as a significant aspect of interpretation. The river is largely unmentioned on the site. Docents in the residence mention the river as a way for guests to visit the plantation, but never why they would come that way. They also describe a ritual of taking guests from the river by carriage around to the land frontage of the residence as a method of exhibiting wealth and power. This is a more appropriate method to teach about the Virginia gentry than that employed at Berkeley, but it still lacks discussion of the river beyond this point, despite extensive discussion of the agricultural nature of the property, which is a considerable problem. Again the river is in the background, ever present and visible, but invisible in the consciousness of heritage tourists and invisible in an eighteenth-century narrative.⁴⁵

There are a number of extant James River Plantations, many of which are not open to the public unlike Shirley and Berkeley. The National Park Service has created an interpretive site for the James River plantations on a website dedicated to heritage

⁴⁵ For more information on interpretation at Shirley Plantation, see Chapter 3.

itineraries that provides better history and a better experience than an actually-visiting tourist of the James River sites could obtain. This website considers the plantations as a grouping of thirty-three locations and the story they tell together. Through the website visitors can consider three important topics through interpretive essays: Gentry, Colonization, and Architecture. The travel itinerary website considers the landscape much more effectively than the interpretation at the sites themselves. However, the website interpretation of the significance of the river to the three highlighted topics is still minimal at best. The splash webpage for the James River itinerary features a virtual river tour allowing site visitors to electronically travel the James and understand the location of the plantations in relation to the river. Unfortunately, the total discussion of the significance of the local rivers—James, Rappahannock, and Potomac—constitutes only about one sentence in each essay. According to the website, the river was used and was necessary for shipping in the region. The river also stretched the population along its banks, scattering them into isolation and creating a lack of settled towns in Virginia. These are two significant points, unfortunately they represent the extent of the website discussion. While the James River plantation website takes great steps forward when considering the plantations as a whole and introducing visitors to the idea of historic landscape, it still does not provide a well-rounded historical narrative that encourages guests to consider the influence of the physical landscape in the development and success of the American colonies in the eighteenth century.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ National Park Service, “A National Register of Historic Places Travel Itinerary: James River Plantations”, National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places, in partnership with the James River Plantations of Charles City County, Virginia, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and the

In contrast to the wealth of resources and dearth of interpretation at James River sites, the historic locations on the Ashley River are a model for a new form of landscape interpretation that can engage guests and provide a well-rounded narrative. The Ashley River does not have as many eighteenth-century sites remaining for guests to investigate as the James due to the destruction of the Civil War. Those that do remain are interpreted in a mix of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century styles. The primary locations available are Drayton Hall, Middleton Place Plantation, and Magnolia Plantation in Charleston, and farther out in the system of creeks and marshes, Hampton Plantation and Boone Hall Plantation in McClellanville. The two primary locations for eighteenth-century interpretation on the Ashley are Drayton Hall and Middleton Place Plantation. Both excel at integration of physical geography as significant aspects of interpretation and consideration of a larger context of plantations as a grouping.⁴⁷

The Middleton Place Plantation experience, at first glance seems disappointing, but the grounds have potential that has not been realized. The foundation that has created the overall experience at the plantation has expanded greatly and does a tremendous amount with very little in the way of original structure. The plantation itself is not truly extant. The original plantation was designed and constructed in the eighteenth century in much the same way as other plantation homes seen throughout the Carolinas and

National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers,
<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/jamesriver/index.htm> (accessed October 8, 2009).

⁴⁷ Magnolia Plantation is largely presented as nineteenth century in context. Boone Hall is a reconstruction from 1936 and presents a disjointed but primarily nineteenth-century narrative. While Hampton Plantation is an eighteenth-century site, it is quite far from the others and is located on a small creek and so has been excluded from this portion of the study. More information on interpretation at Hampton Plantation can be found in Chapter 5.

Virginia. This design includes a main residence with two flanking structures for guests or other activities, with still lesser structures housing the necessary tasks of farm life and servant needs. Unfortunately, the main residence and one of the flankers was destroyed during the Civil War. All that remains is the partially reconstructed flanker that survived. Nonetheless, the overall landscape of Middleton Place has allowed the historic context to survive and made it into a popular site for guests.

The historic house museum that has been established in the surviving dependency at Middleton Place is ineffective as a heritage tourism experience. The primary narrative of the tour is the prominence of the Middleton family and the extant collection of Middleton furnishings, displayed as proof of the power and wealth. The residence is a mismatched and inconsistently furnished collection of art and artifacts. Because the tour is of a flanker, likely used as lodging for Middleton guests when constructed, it has a limited number of interior spaces. These interior spaces are filled with all manner of furnishings and decorative arts that do not always coincide with the interpreted function of each room. The interior also includes a large collection of portraiture that is more confusing than instructive. Docents recite the names of the persons in the portraits and a complicated family tree that lacks context and meaning for visitors. Overall, the residence is almost like a storehouse of furnishings that might be more appropriately housed in an interpretive center with a rotating exhibit. Given the lack of cohesion and message in the residence itself, it falls to the rest of the site to create a more accurate and appropriate discussion of eighteenth-century life.

The gardens and landscape of Middleton Place are the truly remarkable features that deserve a greater place within the site's overall narrative. Guests are left largely to explore the site on their own, but are welcomed to join garden tours, interact with living history interpreters in the agricultural areas, or take cart tours of the grounds. Interpretive signs and guidebooks explain the prominent features of the landscape. The gardens of Middleton Place were established in the eighteenth century. Extant terracing of the approach to the Ashley River was accomplished by hundreds of slaves owned by the Middleton family.⁴⁸ (See Figure 2.1) The river frontage is prominent as are the rice paddies that remain on the river. There are outbuildings involved in rice production that remain on site for guests to explore. These portions of the site include interpretive signs. In some parts of the year, when the camellias are in bloom or during rice-planting season, guests get to see a more in-depth treatment of plantation life. This interaction with everyday life at a plantation that is dependent upon the landscape is meaningful for guests. It allows them to understand the important role that landscape played in determining work patterns, leisure, and wealth. This treatment, if combined with a well-defined narrative that encompasses the Ashley River context, would create a unique opportunity for guests to interact with a total history of the site. This new, total history would have the ability to overwhelm the strictures of public memory and allow guests to

⁴⁸ The place of slavery at Middleton place is addressed in Chapter 5. For greater discussion of the landscape and slavery as connected to the rice culture see: Bernard Bailyn, "Considering the Slave Trade: History and Memory," *William and Mary Quarterly* III 58, no. 1 (January 2001):245-252; Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005); Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Edda L. Fields-Black, *Deep Roots: Rice Farmers in West Africa and the African Diaspora* (Bloomington: IN, Indiana University Press, 2008).

understand that history is more than dates, names, and structures and encompasses larger contexts.

Based on the physical geography of Middleton Place, guests have a good opportunity to understand the challenges and rewards of life in the lowcountry as supported by the river system. Middleton Place is one of several rice plantations on the Ashley River. These palatial residences were built to house great men and their families, to support an agrarian lifestyle that also spoke to power and influence. As the self-guided grounds tour book explains “Water was not only important for ornamental lakes, but vital to the economic life of the plantation.”⁴⁹ Rice cultivation in the eighteenth century was dependent upon reliable supplies of two essential resources, water and slaves. The location of Middleton Place on the river provided the family with both the water required for the cultivation of lucrative rice crops and avenue for its transport. These rice crops made South Carolina the wealthiest colony of the eighteenth-century. The infrastructure of rice cultivation, as well as the technique to grow rice successfully, was founded upon African slaves. The Middletons also used the site to display their power and money by constructing the elaborately planned gardens of the residence and the impressive river frontage. Eighteenth-century guests would be impressed, as they traveled the river to visit the Middletons, Draytons, or other Ashley River residents, when they saw the imposing house, earthworks, formal gardens, and hundreds of slaves toiling away. As seen in Figure 2.1, the river frontage is still quite impressive. When describing the residents of

⁴⁹ Middleton Place Foundation, *Middleton Place Self – Guided Tour* (Charleston, South Carolina: Middleton Place Foundation, 2009). This pamphlet is provided free with every admission and guests are required to retain it throughout their stay as verification of their paid entrance. In this way Middleton Place foundation forces guests to carry around educational materials that they otherwise might not have paid attention to.

South Carolina, eighteenth-century visitors observed that “The planters and merchants are rich and well bred; the people are shewy and expensive in their dress and way of living; so that everything conspires to make this by much the liveliest and politest place, as it is one of the richest too, in all America.”⁵⁰ Middleton Place exemplifies this sentiment well.

When considering site and landscape at Middleton Place, guest materials tend to gravitate to the gardens above all other attractions of the site. While the gardens are a considerable historical feature, they are the result of the wealth and resources made available by the river. It is the most critical historical feature when considering the overall context and significance of Middleton Place Plantation. The official guide to Middleton Place explains only that the river was the best way to reach the residence in the eighteenth century. Docents reinforce this idea by discussing the planning that was required by guests when visiting on a tidal river. The significance of the river is greater than exemplified by either the published guides or the tour descriptions but these two sources of information introduce visitors to thinking about the landscape as a vital aspect of the history of the site.⁵¹ While this is a good start, this theme could be greatly amplified to provide a substantial and powerful historical context involving landscape and everyday life.

⁵⁰Edmund Burke, “Chapters Relating to the Settlement of South Carolina,” in *An Account of the European Settlements in America, in six parts, Volume II* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1760), 258. This analysis of the South Carolinians is echoed in a number of accounts from England and from the other mainland colonies.

⁵¹ Middleton Place Foundation, *Middleton Place* (Charleston, South Carolina: Middleton Place Foundation, 2009). This work is the official guide for the property and is for sale to guests. It is described by docents and other staff as a good way to both commemorate and understand the property.

Landscape interpretation at Drayton Hall, also situated on the Ashley River, should serve as an example to other river sites for the method it employs to encourage guest exploration. It is a good marriage of accurate narrative and innovative interpretation. Interpreters at the site have integrated historic landscape features such as rivers and marshes, and constructed landscape features such as the historic residence to create a well-rounded experience that considers the site as a whole. The narrative at Drayton Hall tells a complete story that meshes well with the larger context of the area and encourages guests to consider historic sites as the sum of their parts, not merely disparate residences with attendant grounds. In addition to the tour of the residence, guests are given a self-guided tour brochure encouraging them to consider the marsh and river aspects of the site. It explains that “Like the main house, the land of Drayton Hall has stories to tell. ... As you walk these trails, look, listen, imagine, and try to piece together the stories written in the land around you.” In addition, for a small fee, guests can rent a portable video device that includes an hour long presentation called *The Voices of Drayton Hall*, keyed to landmarks on the site. The video presentation discusses the river, ecological concerns, the manner in which both white and black inhabitants interacted with the site, and the meaning that the land has had for the people inhabiting and visiting it. The Drayton Hall official guide encourages guests to consider that “while a house is inert, a landscape is alive”, and further think about the fact that all aspects of the site, house, and landscape, have undergone changes over time, reflective of the history of the area.⁵²

⁵² National Trust for Historic Preservation and Drayton Hall, *Drayton Hall Self Guided Walks*:

Guests to Drayton Hall are presented with a residence arrayed in a manner they may not expect—it is devoid of furnishings. The residence is fully bare which means that guests must focus on architectural details, because other than these there are only the words of the docent to bring them into the eighteenth century and to assist them in understanding. It is an approach reminiscent of Puritan churches, devoid of ornament and distraction congregants were forced to focus on what was truly significant. This Puritan approach works well at Drayton Hall as guests are transported through narrative into another time, one that depended on an understanding of landscape for prosperity and power. The lack of furnishings in the residence and the organization of the fenestration create a sense of transparency and make the landscape more evident than it might have been centuries before. The significance of this effect is that it encourages guests to consider the residence as part of a larger site. It combines the indoor and outdoor narratives seamlessly. Docents are free to discuss the residence and its place within the landscape, the importance of the river, the proximity to Charleston, the marshes, and the old growth trees from the many vistas the residence provides. From the land elevation, (see Figure 2.2), guests are encouraged to look out from the second floor balcony and consider the former ancillary structures and the functional nature of the land side of the residence. From the river elevation (see Figure 2.3) guests are encouraged to consider the significance of the river for the family, guests, and commerce. The interior of the

Marsh Walk, River Walk (Charleston, South Carolina: National Trust for Historic Preservation and Drayton Hall, 2009). This brochure is free for all guests. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, *The Voices of Drayton Hall: An Interactive Landscape Tour on DVD*, DVD, executive producer Libby H. O'Connell (New York, NY: The History Channel, 2007). This DVD production is the presentation for viewing on a portable video device at the site. National Trust for Historic Preservation and Drayton Hall, *Drayton Hall* (Charleston, South Carolina: National Trust for Historic Preservation and Drayton Hall, 2005). This small guidebook is available for purchase by guests.

residence becomes even more significant as guests consider the work it took not just to build it, but to get the materials to the site in the first place. This unification of grounds and structures encourage new lines of thought for guests who are not accustomed to a historic site experience of this kind. It not only provides them with a powerful set of mental images, but causes them to retain more information because it challenges them as an imaginative exercise. The big picture, for the family, for South Carolina, for American history, all present themselves in this place and work themselves into the public memory.

Given the important part the river played in the lives of the Middletons, Draytons, and the other Ashley River residents, it is a missed opportunity that historic tours of the river are not available. Tours of the river are possible from Charleston and Middleton Place via sea kayak and other conveyances but these are for biological exploration and wildlife experiences not tied to the plantations or non-natural history. History excursions do not currently exist, which would provide a unique method for guests to experience historic river culture. Historic sites along the Ashley introduce their visitors to the river as the primary means of transportation to homes in the eighteenth century as reliable roads were not available. This was true for guests and goods. Modern guests should have the opportunity to take the water route up to the eighteenth-century plantations from the city so that they can experience what has been described by so many of the extant documents. Docents at Drayton Hall admit that there has been some interest in developing this type of tour. However, logistically the idea is far from a workable model. The Ashley is a tidal river which presents a challenge. Timing also presents a challenge. A river tour cannot work like a bus tour. If guests want to stop and take in the

plantations on land tours, time becomes a significant factor. Despite the many logistical issues, which likely include financial and insurance concerns, a history tour would be a good complement to the Ashley River sites and enhance their interpretation. In the case of the James River sites, a river tour presents a superior method for consideration of the history of the area. The James River plantations extend from just below the falls in Richmond to Williamsburg. The plantations that line the James River are more extant than the Ashley examples, but many are not open to the public. In this case, a river tour is more feasible for guests as stops would not be necessary and docents could develop a well-rounded historical narrative that encourages understanding of the landscape and the uses of the river from the river, on a tour boat. Many of the James River sites are more visible from the river than from the road allowing guests to see them much as guests in former centuries did.

* * * *

Understanding the Atlantic context and the idea that landscape was a determining factor in the lives of eighteenth-century Americans opens up an entirely new level of meaning and understanding for guests with regard to architectural history. Many guests have an appreciation of architecture at a very basic level. They appreciate historic architectural styles in an aesthetic way. Some like to know the names of these styles but for the most part architectural history is presented in a cursory manner. Looking at the design of an eighteenth-century residence is not much different than walking by a settee. It is something to look at briefly, but certainly not the main attraction, and not something that typically garners much attention or foments discussion. Encouraging an appreciation

for architectural history and the determinants behind eighteenth-century design will assist guests in understanding historical context, the American experience, and an appreciation for the difficult work of preservation. While there are notable exceptions in heritage tourism when architecture is discussed with guests, the real meaning behind the structure is not truly explored. The function of the historic structure is as a casing for history but not as a document in the larger narrative as it should be. Unlike other primary sources in the collections of historic house museums or historical foundations which are preserved and typically not experienced by the casual visitor, a historic residence is a primary source that visitors can make a connection with in a real way—they can exist within this document as they tour. This perspective is not encouraged by docents, creating a missed opportunity for guests to consider the historical process. Considering the architecture and design of a structure not only assists guests in making a connection to everyday eighteenth-century life, it encourages them to consider history in a more practical manner that takes context into account and considers determining factors such as landscape and connections to the Atlantic.

This context-oriented approach to history and architecture is presented at Drayton Hall. Throughout the Drayton Hall tour guests are shown from different vistas and perspectives, including the ways that the residence fits into the larger landscape both local and Atlantic. Guests are encouraged to look out from the portico to the land entrance in order to understand the site placement of the residence. A discussion of the difficulty of building on swampy land is also presented, allowing guests to understand that construction was a costly challenge that could only be afforded by the few. Inside the

residence, structural and decorative details are discussed, including those that are not original to the residence but represent change over time. Guests are encouraged to view the residence as preservationists and architectural historians piecing together the alterations to the residence and understanding the changing function of the space. In this way guests are led to understand the use of local materials, the importance of site placement, the needs of residents in the area, and the way that residences physically functioned for their inhabitants over time. In addition, Drayton Hall has the added advantage of being so intact that docents can discuss the overall design of the structure, its reliance on English fashion, and the character-defining features that make it emblematic of its architectural style. The lingering evidence of slavery in the structure through the bricks in the basement that still bear the fingerprints of their makers and the evidence of skin oils in the walls where domestics would have been stationed, assist guests in understanding the importance of slavery in the physical construction of the built environment and the significance of the Atlantic to the basic needs of residential construction. In this way guests become well informed as they move to other residences of this period, understanding that structures themselves tell a story even if other sites do not advance such interpretation.

Architectural history is not the only possibility to be explored once narratives expand to encourage guests to discover bigger ideas than typically proposed. The integration of the Atlantic context and landscape concerns are essential to ensuring that guests develop an appreciation for a history that is supported by documents and promotes greater understanding. Narratives and interpretations that do not integrate these aspects

are not providing guests with good history; they are perpetuating historical myths that have plagued America for centuries. The same myths that have in the past excluded large sectors of the population based on race, gender, or economic status. Sites that persist in presenting one-sided narratives that encourage insular history and overemphasize American exceptionalism are not working toward the modification of public memory, education, or understanding. Exclusion of the Atlantic context, ignorance of the landscape, and insistence on the creation of the small-scale narrative creates a historical illusion that does no credit to the American experience. Narratives that focus on objects for their aesthetic quality or difference, “firsts”, and important white men, cloud the historical narrative and trivialize the eighteenth-century experience as simplistic and uniform. Public historians must work on a daily basis to constantly improve interpretation and planning in order to provide the public with a an accurate history that encourages reformation of public memory to a more realistic narrative.



Figure 2.1 Aerial View of Middleton Place Plantation including slave created earthworks on river frontage⁵³



Figure 2.2 Land Elevation at Drayton Hall Plantation

⁵³ Middleton Place Foundation, “Middleton Place”, Middleton Place Plantation. <http://www.middletonplace.org> (accessed August 25, 2009)



Figure 2.3 River Elevation at Drayton Hall Plantation

Chapter Three: The Public Historian's Most Visible Tool

Historic residences are the backbone of public history. For preservation specialists and museum interpreters, historic residences are the most visible representations to the public of history and community. Historic residences are the most powerful tool of these public historians because of their ability to convey strong historical messages to visitors and local residents. This is possible because residences are a tangible representation of the lives of historical actors and offer a glimpse at historical everyday life. They create a connection for the public because shelter is a basic human need and the material and ritual attached to the creation of shelter speaks to individuals. The public is interested in historic lifeways. They want to see and understand how life was constructed in the past and make comparisons to their own experience. This public interest can be a powerful tool for public historians seeking to reform public memory. It allows for the development of challenging historical narrative and creates an audience that is receptive to an overall theme. It is through the gateway of everyday life that public historians have the opportunity to make real inroads in the development of public memory. They have the opportunity to reinforce or change the public perception of the past through this medium. But this can only be accomplished by developing historic house museum tours that connect individuals with everyday life through meaningful contexts and challenging narratives.

While historic house museums have infinite potential for the shaping of public memory and the conveyance of historical experience, this is no small task. Historic house museums present complex problems for history professionals. Every historic house

museum is unique. The available artifacts, structures, and primary source documents are different in every location. Public historians must work to develop a meaningful experience from the unique mix of history and artifacts at each site, which is a highly creative but also challenging prospect. Each location exhibits unique problems that must be solved, concerns that are modern rather than historical in nature, such as budget and public accessibility. While not dismissing the practical concerns which drive all historical enterprises they are not the focus of this study. The issues that are addressed here are those of developing and executing an effective historical narrative that speaks to many types of guests while remaining true to the established goals of portraying everyday life in an approach which educates and informs in a lasting manner.

Guests to historic residences expect to interact with the physical and visual aspects of a residence, but are not always cognizant that they are also interacting with a narrative. Nonetheless, it is the narrative that will do the most to educate and inform guests. The key to the development of effective residence interpretation is the creative use of available resources. This does not just indicate manuscript sources, but also encompasses architectural, archaeological, and material culture sources to create the best, most accurate, and most meaningful experience for heritage tourists. Residences work well as a meaningful intersection with tourists because they are associated in the minds of the populace as locations of life in every age. Homes are where real life occurs and for our voyeuristic society the idea of peeking into a private home to glimpse a different life is quite tantalizing. The most effective historic homes are those that display life and a sense of vibrancy despite the fact that the inhabitants are long dead. A “dead house”, one

with no life or sense of realistic occupancy, represents poor public history and a significant problem in eighteenth-century interpretation. It is through thoughtful use of the available sources that interpreters can create narratives that capture the vibrancy of the site and thereby the attention of guests.

Historic house museums should be recognized as the ambassadors of public history. There are many achievements and working professionals associated with public history in the archival field, in historic preservation, and in conservation of resources, which are not visible to the general public in a way that permeates their consciousness. The most visible effect of public history is the historic house museum. Historic residences are the most visited, loved, and remembered of all historic sites. The prevalence of the historic house museum has made it an essential teaching tool in cities and towns across America. Even the smallest local historical society frequently owns and operates a historic house museum. Unfortunately, the historic house museum has not always been used as an effective tool for education of the public. The historic house museum, its tour and its context, must be reinvented to meet the needs of today's heritage tourist and to develop a new public historical memory. The power of the historic house to accomplish these goals lies in the ability of interpretation, narrative, and visibility to encourage an interest in local history for all visitors. The development of an effective heritage experience at these sites must consider impact for both out-of-town visitors and local guests in order to create the greatest impact for the greatest number of people.

Historic residences are more than revenue tools; they must become historic emblems in their respective communities. These residences, whether nationally known or

dependent upon local interest, must understand their responsibility to both out-of-town tourists and their community. Historic house museums have an obligation to develop tours and experiences that encourage guests to consider local history as national history and to understand why residences are the preferred method of interaction between Americans and their history. There are numerous eighteenth-century historic house museums that function well, creating truly individual experiences that stay with guests for years to come. Visionary interpreters and planners have developed meaningful and memorable experiences at Mount Vernon, Monticello, Cliveden, Drayton Hall, and other well-known historic homes. These sites are successful because they create meaning for both the local community and their out-of-town audience. Even in the off season, these residences take their places as emblems of communities that are cognizant of and celebrate a meaningful past. Unfortunately, these residences are an exception rather than the rule at eighteenth-century historic home sites. Historic sites of all sizes, from the local to the national, no matter how prominent, must rediscover the purpose of the heritage residence, its transformative power, and its responsibility to the historical narrative. This issue is essential for eighteenth-century heritage sites. Their period of interpretation is so distant that creating a connection with modern guests can be particularly challenging. In the case of these sites, it is vital that narratives are developed that take into account both significant local and national contexts, to create greater meaning for visitors.

Historic house museums present many challenges for public historians, but the most crucial problem to be solved is selecting the period of interpretation. It is a universal truth that the built environment is and always has been composed of structures created for

use. Every structure has an intended use. This use has not only changed over time, it has also altered the building over time too. A structure that has been in use for over two hundred years will have over time evolved to meet the needs of the users. A residence that met the needs of eighteenth-century inhabitants quite well would be completely unsuited for twenty-first century use without modifications. In addition to the evolution of the structure itself, the lives of the inhabitants of each building has been significant over its long history. In order to create a tour that is effective and meaningful, public historians must select the moment in the history of each building to be portrayed. This is essential because most heritage tourists do not have a good working memory of the intricacies of American history and cannot always make easy distinctions about different moments in history. To interpret the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries in a single space leaves too much for tourists to digest except in very rare circumstances. While it is important that change over time be understood, the purpose of the museum is to instruct and enlighten, not to confuse or bewilder. As such, interpreters must work from the larger history of the site and select a period that they find to be the most meaningful and useful in the instruction of guests. This period of interpretation responds to the site, the available resources, and educational goals.

The determination of period as part of a larger interpretive plan is essential because it creates the framework around which everything else is developed. The most instructive tours, the ones that remain with visitors, are those that present a concise history that allows them to step into a predetermined moment. The determination of this subject time can be problematic, though. To select one year—1769 for example—is to

exclude others that were of equal importance. To select the eighteenth century and discuss residents during the Revolution excludes any history of the Civil War, a problem in many areas where the residences were touched by both. The selection of a date may seem arbitrary and artificial, but the selection of themes, restoration work, even furnishings, as part of the interpretive process is largely dependent upon the selection of a date or period. Frequently elements of the residence itself will make the selection of interpretive time quite obvious. If the residence was constructed in the eighteenth century but is filled with the artifacts and documents of the nineteenth-century inhabitants, then the nineteenth century seems the natural choice. Once the interpretive time is determined it should be used as a constant throughout the narrative so that visitors can understand the overall experience and can better connect with the themes presented. Residences that do not select an interpretive moment will have difficulty making connections with guests and will not be able to present their themes effectively.

No matter what period determined as the most viable option, the interpretation within the house must be constructed in such a way as to convey not just this frozen moment in history, but also the life that existed at this moment. One of the most troubling and persistent problems of historic house museums is the creation of “dead houses.” Even the most well-constructed dwelling, perfectly intact and full of period furnishings, can have this problem. Historic residences must convey a real sense of life and vitality to be effective. History must come alive for visitors, which is what most heritage tourists are looking for. Admittedly, some are seeking antique furniture and ghost stories, but more often guests are seeking a living, breathing, meaningful historical experience to assist

them in understanding their own life, and American history in a larger context. Local residents will seek within the historic house information on how their own neighborhood or city fits into the larger themes of history. All visitors seek a glimpse of everyday life at a different time, to feel the resonance of history within their own daily existence.

Successful historic residences must convey this information. In order to be effective in the creation of an accurate and textured public memory, historic house museums must present a strong narrative based on sources, make connections on a number of levels from the local to the global, and encourage interest and inquiry from guests. This level of success in interpretation is lacking in many historic residences, particularly eighteenth-century examples. The further the past is from the present, the more difficult it becomes for interpreters to create meaningful and vital narratives, leading many to fall into the trap of the “dead house.”

The problem of the “dead house” is best exemplified by Shirley Plantation in Charles City, Virginia. This residence was constructed in the eighteenth century and existed then as an elite agricultural property. Literature and publicity for the Shirley Plantation as a historic site promises much, but to the disappointment of visitors, delivers little. The residence suffers from problems of interpretation and misuse of available sources. The house does not evince vitality, and overall reflects an example of poor interpretation that fails to meet the challenges of modern heritage tourism. When considered based on the criteria presented above, Shirley does not meet any of the essential needs for effective historical narrative. It presents a poor and disjointed narrative based on the sources and makes relatively weak connections to local and

national history. These factors lead to Shirley's place as a "dead house" that does not inspire inquiry in guests or impact public memory in a meaningful way.

Visitors to Shirley Plantation along the James River are welcomed to a plantation home with well-kept grounds. The residence is surrounded by a number of extant outbuildings and some archaeological excavation. Aspects of the agricultural portion of the property are left open for exploration by guests at their leisure. The orientation map (see Figure 3.1) at Shirley shows guests the many areas to be explored, each with a small interpretive point. (see Figure 3.2) It is obvious from this visitor handout that the history presented at Shirley is flat and unilateral. It plants seeds that it does not cultivate. For example, the description in Figure 3.1 encourages guests to "Notice the symmetrical layout of the outbuildings which creates a formal forecourt typical of English Estates."⁵⁴ Here visitors are told that this American plantation is emulating an English style in the organization of its tertiary structures, but they are not told why this is significant. It is also not evident that the Georgian style architecture of the residence is an English style—a significant fact. While the handout is concerned with pointing out similarity, it does not explore difference. As a residence on the James River, Shirley has two facades: one for visitors by land, another for visitors by water. The handout points out that during the colonial period the river was used extensively for the shipment of goods and arrival of guests, but there is no connection discussed as to the significance of this fact to the design of the exterior elevations. The handout is not the only method of interaction between guests and the residence; tours are also offered of the interior of the residence itself. The

⁵⁴ Shirley Plantation, *Visitor Orientation Map: Shirley Plantation* (Charles City, Virginia: Shirley Plantation, 2008).

tour begins and ends at the front door of the residence and does not travel into any of the outbuildings. The visitor handout is the only interaction guests have with the grounds and outbuildings. The handout encourages visual exploration, but not mental consideration of the ancillary structures, the grounds, or the significance of the landscape.

Shirley is still inhabited on upper floors by a living descendant of the Carter family which allows the lower floor of the residence to be open for guests and tours. The Shirley Plantation tour is focused on the continued Carter family occupancy of the residence, significant furnishings, and connecting the residence and family to historical actors that guests will know, such as Lee or McClellan. Overall, from the vantage point of a public historian, a tour that does not provide a meaningful heritage experience. Shirley's interpreters have not made a meaningful connection to guests and have relied on the fame and power of others to develop context for the residence. There is no ability for guests to understand the context of the residence or site and little ability to understand everyday life in the eighteenth century.

Shirley is similar to other historic home tours to be found in Virginia, in that it does not distinguish itself in the minds of guests. Virginia is a challenging environment for public historians because of the volume of local history that is part of popular memory. There are many historic sites, battlefields, homes, and businesses in Virginia associated with American memory of the colonial period, the Revolution, the first presidents, and the Civil War. With so many opportunities available for the public to engage with their history, it is necessary for some of these locations develop a different approach to stand out in the minds of visitors. While some locations have met this

challenge, others are severely lacking. And while Virginia is not the only state to be plagued by “dead houses” and other ineffective heritage tourism experiences, it provides a good laboratory for investigation.

Shirley Plantation should be understood as an example of the “dead house” problem. There is ample historical evidence available to develop a truly engaging tour that draws visitors into the experience of life at Shirley. However, the site has multiple issues that prevent it from existing as a truly wonderful experience for heritage tourists interested in the eighteenth century. The most glaring of these issues is a failure to select a single period to interpret. The problem lies in the family history of the home. Docents struggle to discuss significant elements of the family’s history over an extended period within the small number of interpreted interior spaces. They address architectural features, the eighteenth-century inhabitants, the continuous history of family occupancy, and the importance of the location during the Civil War. With so much to do and little context, it is not surprising that none is done to its greatest effectiveness. Based on the extant structures and the architectural significance of the residence, the most appropriate period to interpret is the eighteenth century. A good case could also be made for the lives of women in the Confederacy during the Civil War. Historical evidence and period furnishings exist to interpret either, but not both. To interpret both leaves the docent in a challenging position and leaves guests confused at the end of the tour. The need for identification of a period of interpretation is also evident in the Shirley Plantation handout (see Figure 3.2), where several different periods are discussed but not developed. The lack of a specific period of interpretation has contributed to the feeling of a “dead

house” at Shirley. Without a specific group of historical actors to portray living within a distinct period that can be flushed out contextually, the residence becomes a shell that once housed generations of Carters and Hills. They become nameless, faceless, and insignificant to guests because the tour has not created the context necessary for these historical persons to have meaning for guests.

These issues at Shirley could be solved with a strong interpretive plan. An interpretive plan forms the backbone of interpretation at any site that employs one. Through the planning process interpreters take the time to understand the true significance of the sources available to them. It is a time to take stock of what the goals of the museum are, who the intended audience is, and how that audience can effectively be reached. Part of this process is also historical research, learning about the structure itself, its ancillary buildings, the family, and the place of the residence within the historical narrative. The interpretive plan gives direction, produces meaningful themes, assists in the development of a period of interpretation, and allows for the creation of meaningful tours tailored to the needs of guests and public memory. From the interpretive plan a mission statement is developed that directs docents, interpreters, and all members of educational staff as to the educational directive, ensuring all members of the organization are on the same page and are working toward the creation of a uniform product. Shirley may have an interpretive plan, but it lacks a sense of cohesion and direction and any educational goals are not evident to guests. As this is the case, a new interpretive plan needs to be developed making use of extant sources and with an eye to

“sing[ing] the song the house sings best,” a sentiment attributed to Peter Gittleman of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities and echoed by others.⁵⁵

With such a limited amount of house to discuss, interpreters at Shirley need to create something concise and meaningful. They need to do a lot with a little. A picture of eighteenth-century life could be developed using extant sources and many of the furnishings and architectural features already inside the residence. In particular, one group of documents that make a significant contribution to the development of an effective narrative is the correspondence between Eliza (known as Betsy) McClurg and Eliza Randolph, who was staying at Shirley in the 1790s. Randolph describes the goings on in the residence and how she and her sister were in many cases making their own fun, as most of the other occupants of Shirley were quite dull. For example, one evening, Eliza writes, “Everyone my dear Betsy is in the parlour, some reading, some working, some sighing, some dying, and I have left them to give you an account of a very funny evening”⁵⁶ The Randolph and McClurg correspondence provides wonderful information about everyday life that can be combined with the accounts of other men and women writing with reference to the residence in order to come to bring the plantation to life. These documents in combination with the scholarly work done by historians such as Kathleen Brown and Rhys Isaac on the broader context of life in Virginia would create a

⁵⁵ Peter Gittleman quoted in Barbara Abramoff Levy, “Interpretation and Planning: Why and How,” in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Foy Donnelly (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2002), 43 – 60. Sandra MacKenzie Lloyd, “Creating Memorable Visits: How to Develop and Implement Theme Based Tours,” in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Foy Donnelly (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2002), 219. MacKenzie Lloyd addresses the challenges faced and met at Cliveden, an eighteenth-century residence in Germantown that faced similar challenges in the 1980s to those Shirley struggles with today.

⁵⁶ Eliza Randolph to Eliza (Betsy) McClurg from Shirley Plantation, February 5, 1798. Spotswood Family Papers 1760–1953, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

tour that allows guests to feel the life that existed in this place.⁵⁷ The vitality of Shirley would not require the use of costumed interpreters or living history. It is possible for docents to convey this atmosphere by developing a tour that creates a specific period of interpretation, uses the primary source documents available, and creates a meaningful sense of the everyday through a descriptive tour, thoughtful staging of the interior, and use of the landscape. This large scale transition, while initially challenging, will result in the investment of guests in the narrative. This transition would create a unique experience at Shirley, a welcome change among James River plantations. Interpreters have the ability through the use of sources to develop a feeling of everyday life that encourages guests to understand common threads and differences with their own lives.

Eighteenth-century residences were locations of family, history, and life just as much as residences today. The significance of their location on the James River and connection to prominent Virginia families has been documented by a number of historians, most notable Brown and Isaac. Kathleen Brown discusses the Virginia plantation house as a tool to the consolidation of the patriarchal network. She mentions Shirley specifically as a significant aspect of the Carter family network.⁵⁸ This makes interpretation at Shirley all the more important as much of the rest of the Carter family social and economic network is not interpreted at this time. Indeed, two of the most significant residences to understanding the significance of patriarchy, birth, and marriage in Virginia are Carter's Grove in Williamsburg, Virginia and Sabine Hall outside of

⁵⁷ Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740 – 1790*, (New York: Norton, 1982).

⁵⁸ Brown, 236.

Richmond. Sabine Hall, colonial seat of Landon Carter, is not currently open to the public. Carter's Grove was sold by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation several years ago and is closed as well. With the silence of these significant resources it falls to Shirley Plantation to discuss the Carter family in a meaningful way within an eighteenth-century context. At the present time, however, docents at Shirley seem more concerned with interpretation of the Hill family and connection to the Lees, who are distant cousins. While the Hills are important to the early story of Shirley, Elizabeth Hill's marriage to Charles Carter was a significant boon to the family economically and socially, interpretation of the Lee connection is out of place. The connection by marriage of the Carters and Lees was significant because both were powerful families; however, it does not contribute to the context of Shirley. The primary purpose of the Lee interpretation is the familiarity of the name for tourists, but it does not add depth to the narrative or understanding to the overall experience. The significance of the Carter family and the significance of the residence should represent the primary focus of interpretation.

The use of the physical residence, the "Great House" and site planning to assert power over subordinates and establish the place of the country gentleman is discussed by Isaac in *The Transformation of Virginia*. He describes this connection as "The prominence of an elevated center, or 'head', to which all other parts or 'members', were subordinate silently reinforced the dignity and claims to obedience of the gentleman who was styled the 'head' of the household."⁵⁹ Shirley has a site plan analogous to those described by Isaac as typical of the Georgian style. This socially significant organization,

⁵⁹ Isaac, 37–39.

carried over from Europe and described as particularly suited to the Chesapeake, provides the ideal setting to teach guests the importance of style and plan in the eighteenth century. The interpreters of Shirley miss this opportunity by not extending their tour out of the residence itself and by only vaguely alluding to the plan as similar to an English one, not as something noteworthy in its own right. The work of interpreters to create a small-scale narrative that does not incorporate the available primary and secondary materials limits their ability to create a meaningful and unique guest experience.

Wilton House in Richmond, Virginia has met the challenge of trying to present something new to visitors. Wilton House was relocated by the Virginia Society of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the 1930s. While not on its original site, the residence still overlooks the James River and is interpreted circa 1753. Wilton was the home of the Randolphs, a prominent eighteenth-century Virginia family. In this historic home, the Colonial Dames have worked to create an experience that makes meaningful interactions with the public and uses a variety of sources, including their own material culture collections to create an intimate feeling that conveys everyday life. While many historic properties have websites, Wilton House has a very useful website that is full of excitement and events. The Wilton staff includes their mission statement and their statement of purpose on the website, which is they state is to provide a meaningful experience for guests and convey good history.⁶⁰ Wilton House provides a number of programs in addition to traditional tours to inform guests on how life progressed in the eighteenth century. This type of experience is sometimes called a

⁶⁰ The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Virginia, "Wilton House Museum," <http://wiltonhousemuseum.org> (accessed July 6, 2009).

“moment-in-time” installation, and can be used to allow guests to step into life as it existed in the time specified. The moment must be clearly dictated so that the historic house can be staged to seem as though the historic actors stepped out only for a moment. Guests feel that they are stepping into life being lived, a powerful experience. For example, during a visit to Wilton House in the Spring of 2008, the residence was arrayed for an eighteenth-century funeral. This was certainly unexpected and made a significant impact. It is unusual for historic residences to deviate too far from a tour that has been established, but Wilton alters the experience frequently, encouraging return trips and investment in the property. For summer of 2009, Wilton engaged in programs on politeness and entertaining in the eighteenth century, even hosting a tea staffed with an interpreter so that guests could learn proper eighteenth-century manners. The program for summer of 2010 considered how eighteenth-century residents dealt with summer heat without air conditioning or modern summer fashions in their everyday lives.⁶¹ The experience at Wilton is an innovative approach, providing a memorable moment for visitors, both locals and tourists, to learn something new. This is likely a moment that will stick with them more than any experience at other residences visited in the area. Public historian Nancy E. Villa Bryk of The Henry Ford Museum points out that the “moment-in-time” installation is particularly meaningful for visual learners who would otherwise learn little and have a less impactful experience if their knowledge was left to a

⁶¹ The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Virginia, “Wilton House Museum,” <http://wiltonhousemuseum.org> (accessed July 6, 2009 and July 8, 2010).

lecture by docents or the reading of an exhibit label.⁶² Wilton has used the idea of the “moment-in-time” to create a sense of vitality and interest at a residence that is 250 years old. This approach not only gives the sense of life in the residence, it encourages guests to think in terms of the everyday. The moments selected at Wilton are instructive. They are not a special or particular moment; rather they are glimpses at the ordinary and mundane facts of living during a specific period. It allows guests to identify with the subject and opens up a greater conversation sure to alter preconceived notions of eighteenth-century life.

Similar to Wilton House, Shirley Plantation has the opportunity to create these types of meaningful experiences. There may be greater potential at Shirley to do so, as it is on its original site and includes many extant outbuildings and excavations. A “moment-in-time” installation, as is employed at Wilton House, could be developed at Shirley in a way that is meaningful to guests, conveys everyday life, and is derived directly from the writings of the historical actors themselves. Based on the sources from the Randolph girls for instance, it would be possible to develop an installation that gives modern guests the experience of being eighteenth-century visitors to the Carter plantation. The residence played host to a number of relatives and friends in the eighteenth century; this could be explained to guests at the front door before entering. This would enable interpreters to educate visitors about the customs of visiting in the town and country and the reasons for

⁶² Nancy E. Villa Bryk, “‘I Wish You Could Take a Peek at Us At the Present Moment’: Infusing the Historic House with Characters and Activity,” in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Foy Donnelly (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2002), 148. Greenfield Village, the subject of this essay, is a museum of structures in Deerborn, Michigan deals primarily with nineteenth-century structures but the same methodology is relevant for eighteenth-century museums.

these visits. Guests could walk in the shoes of Eliza Randolph, pulled from her exciting city life to spend the winter months at Shirley Plantation with her uncle and aunt, her sister, and other family members. Docents could still incorporate discussion of the architecture of the residence, but rather than single it out as the only or best example of a particular style or feature, they could discuss function and practicality. This creates an opportunity to discuss the mark of civility inherent in the selection of Georgian architecture and the order and symmetry echoed throughout the property. The coat of arms and portraits in the entrance hall could also still be discussed, a reminder to modern guests as historical visitors of the prominence of the family, a show of power, blood, and patriarchy so important in Virginia country houses. In the parlor a conversation with guests about what happened in an eighteenth-century parlor and its place in the home would be very useful in conveying a sense of everyday life.

Because there are so few rooms to visit at Shirley, each needs to be made vibrant and significant. Here the words of the Randolph girls can be used to offer visitors an idea of what would be going on in this space. A historical portrait can be painted for the guests using the artifacts present in each room. Visitors can be asked to put themselves in the place of the Randolph girls. Uncle asleep in a chair in the corner, others reading books from the library—maybe one sister reads *Charlotte Temple* while others listen to readings aloud from Pope, maybe Auntie working on needlework by the fire listening to the recitation. What is a young girl to do? Sit daydreaming about the life in Richmond that is passing her by? Pick up her needlework? In this case, guests can be encouraged to consider Eliza Randolph sitting on a settee. What might she be thinking? This approach

encourages guest interaction; it places them in a historical moment, encouraging them to think about something new and different than in the typical heritage tour. Eliza could be thinking about the letter she needs to write to her friend or maybe other obligatory correspondence. She could wait for the correct and polite moment to excuse herself to her chamber for the evening, escaping from the tedium, and leaving others to enjoy the pleasures of an evening spent in the country. In this setting, docents have the opportunity to paint a vivid historical picture using real documents and artifacts to flesh out lifeless rooms in a “dead house”. It is still possible to demonstrate the unique features of the residence to guests—for example, the etchings in the glass windows that have been made by the diamonds of the newly betrothed over hundreds of years, or the period furnishings—but executed in a manner that evokes the living, not the dead.

In addition to creating a better guest experience in the residence, the Shirley tour must spill out into the grounds. While the handout currently given to visitors encourages guests to wander the grounds, the tour and experience would be much richer with the inclusion of some of the surroundings. Here docents can also be assisted by documents that are extant from the period. Eliza Randolph again provides an interesting interpretation in explaining the life that would be in store for Betsy McClurg if she came to visit from Richmond. “We will take you to walk every morning, learn you to jump over hedges, leap ditches, bound like deer over the Rocks, and in short make you perfect mistress, of all the accomplishments of a ruddy country lass.”⁶³ This would be a good way to engage with guests. A country life is different from a city life, even in the

⁶³ Eliza Randolph to Betsy McClurg 1798 from Shirley Plantation. Spotswood Family Papers 1760-1953, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

eighteenth century. There were also certain ideas about country living that by this period had already permeated American culture, a holdover from English ideas of the town and country. Betsy, in her potential visit, would not be shown how to be a proper and genteel country mistress because the only thing that Eliza saw in the country was the ability to show her friend how to be a “ruddy country lass,” a city prejudice that would surely make both girls smile. This prejudice remains in popular culture and can be exploited to make a connection to guests that they would not otherwise have considered. It is a glimpse of everyday life, of how historical actors experienced their surroundings in a tangible manner, which will speak volumes to guests about the historical experience.

The expansion of the tour experience to include the grounds is connected to encouraging guests to understand Shirley as a location where life occurred historically. It is meant to encourage an experience of the everyday to facilitate understanding. In order for guests to truly experience the everyday at Shirley the treatment of slavery at the plantation must be enhanced. Slavery was part of the daily life of Shirley’s residents in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But slavery seems to be a topic that Shirley Plantation is reluctant to address. Slaves are not discussed in the residence, and as seen in the handout (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2), the word “slave” is almost entirely absent. It is carefully omitted in most descriptions. Slaves are only mentioned in the header to the handout as those who did “chores”. The most notable omission of slavery is in the description of the pump house, which is described as providing water for the “yard animals”, and in the description of the bell on top of the smokehouse which summoned in the help or signaled the beginning or end of the work day. There is no discussion of labor

here. Who is doing the work? Guests are left largely to assume that either the family did it, or servants, but the language seems deliberately vague. To omit slavery from the Shirley narrative gives the impression that whitewashed history is acceptable and that the slave experience lacked meaning and is not significant enough for interpretation. For example, the map does not include a slave quarter when one previously existed. Indeed, Shirley had so many outbuildings historically and such extensive holdings, the property likely housed more than the average number of slaves. In one of the Shirley outbuildings, a small installation includes a brief discussion of slavery based on excavation on the site, but to omit this information from the tour and focus only on the white Carter family is a grave omission. Visitors cannot understand the true context and significance of Shirley, and cannot interact with the truth about everyday life in the eighteenth-century South while present, if not the voices of slaves are left silent in the interpretation.⁶⁴

Shirley has attempted to remedy some of their interpretive issues by instituting a website that fills in some of the blanks. The website works to remedy the slave problem by including a separate tab that discusses the location of an extant slave cabin on adjoining property, one that is no longer owned by the family. The explanation on the website is very good; it includes primary and secondary research, explains the importance of slavery in Virginia, and the opinions of the Carter family on slavery from the eighteenth century onward. This treatment is quite thorough and provides good information for guests, but it does not change the omission of the material at the site itself, and only informs guests who care enough to do more research after they get home

⁶⁴ For further discussion of the problem of slavery and interpretation, see Chapter 5.

or before arriving. For casual tourists, this will likely not occur. The website explains that a new slavery exhibit is planned, which shows that Shirley Plantation is aware of the problem, but an exhibit is as far as they will go to remedy it. This seems very basic mitigation to cover the holdings of Charles Carter, which according to the website included 785 slaves in 8 counties in 1787.⁶⁵ The website provides good information, but it cannot impart a sense of everyday life at Shirley Plantation or initiate the type of discussion among guests necessary to broach the topic of slavery.

In addition to working to remedy the slavery problems involved in site interpretation at Shirley, the website also seeks to clarify the chronology of the tour and site. According to the website, a timeline exhibit was installed in one of the outbuildings in 2009. The new timeline installed at Shirley, which is also available on the website, provides a chronology for guests, perhaps to assist in clarifying the confusing history presented on the tour. Overall, the timelines represent only a simple chronology. Timelines cannot develop context, impart significance, or alter public memory, the real work of interpreters at the site. The use of a timeline reinforces the idea, long held in the minds of Americans, that history is only about dates on a line. The purpose of the heritage tourism experience is not to reinforce these older ideas but to alter public memory by educating on the significance of the historical narrative and its relevance to modern America. For example, according to the timeline, Jamestown was founded on the James River in 1607 and Shirley was founded further down the James River in 1613.

⁶⁵ Shirley Plantation, "Slavery at Shirley Plantation," <http://www.shirleyplantation.com/slavery.html> (accessed July 6, 2009) Notably, while the discussion of Shirley Plantation and slavery on the site is very good, there is little by way of cited sources that could encourage further exploration.

Without context or interpretation, how can this have meaning? These points on a line cannot convey to guests the deeper significance of the events listed or the meanings of the stories they have heard on the tour. The proprietors of Shirley Plantation have made attempts, particularly with the website, to make up for areas that are lacking in the interpretation, but what is really needed is an infusion of life, truth, and good history through a revamped tour and guest experience. This is the only method with which to alter public memory by providing an experience of the everyday and developing a tour that continues to resonate after guests have exited the grounds.

More confusing than the interaction between the tour, website, and timeline are the offerings of educational programs at Shirley for school groups. The educational programs offered are described on the website and appear to cover some of the omissions from the standard guest experience. For students at a primary school level programs are offered that consider the prominence of the James River, slavery understood through documents and artifacts, politeness in the eighteenth century, religion for both white and black residents, and a discussion of agricultural techniques. High school students have the opportunity to learn about primary source documents from the Civil War in order to understand how these documents can be used to learn about the residence. These are good, informative programs that cover important topics which are not covered at the site in a meaningful way for regular visitors of all age groups. Students are benefitting from the type of experience that all guests should have. While Shirley is doing the work of altering public memory from a primary and secondary school perspective, it is not reinforcing this message by continuing with adults or with children who visit as tourists

rather than students. They are not challenging their guests to understand a larger or more textured narrative as they do for school children.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, this discrepancy further highlights the grave interpretive problems faced at Shirley.

The problem of the “dead house” is one that is equally pressing when considering interpretation for adults and school age groups. Residential sites are vital tools to educate the public and reform memory. They are successful in this manner because of their ability to create personal connections with guests. As residential structures they provide a glimpse of everyday life, constituting a powerful medium with which to speak to visitors of all ages. Historic residences create a common experience that functions as a lens for guests to view the past. In a “dead house,” the everyday aspect is not evident. The structure is not full of warmth or a believable sense of life. The historical illusion is not present. It has instead become a structure without meaning that could never have been inhabited in a believable fashion. This cold and lifeless impression does not draw guests into a learning experience. Instead of being active participants in a learning environment, they are instead spectators in a location that seems distant and irrelevant. In order for public history to progress and have real relevance and impact on public memory, the “dead house” problem must be remedied.

Cliveden, in Germantown, Pennsylvania is a good example of a residence transcending the “dead house” problem. Interpreters have created a residence tour that meets the needs of both local visitors and tourists. Cliveden is owned and operated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which is fitting, as Cliveden gives guests a

⁶⁶ Shirley Plantation, “Educational Programs,” http://www.shirleyplantation.com/educational_programs.html (accessed July 24, 2009).

glimpse at very early attempts at preservation in America and how that work continues today. Cliveden was the site of the Revolutionary War Battle of Germantown. Because of the instrumental nature of the residence and grounds to the battle, the Chew family was proud to own such a piece of history and understood the importance of the residence during the eighteenth century. Interpreters have taken advantage of this unique and exciting history to incorporate both the battle and the work of the family to preserve and maintain the residence into the tour. The residence tour makes connections with guests on a number of levels. Guests learn the history of the residence and the its many owners, and they are also encouraged to explore the history of their own neighborhoods. In addition, Cliveden has developed a tour that takes stock of the landscape and encourages thoughtful consideration on the part of guests.

“The Chew House”—as it was referred to in the eighteenth century—was continually occupied by the Chew family from 1767-1972 with the exception of one span of twenty years. Given this continued use and occupancy, interpreters at Cliveden were initially faced with many of the problems that the interpreters of Shirley Plantation also struggle. They were possessed a remarkably intact residence, full of family articles, with many family papers, and an already established legacy in the area. However, the interpreters at the Chew House met this challenge by developing a theme-based tour built upon an extensive planning process. The interpretive planning process created the opportunity to take full stock of the materials available and create a vibrant tour that brought life and excitement for guests and docents. This energy, derived from the

interpretive plan, has allowed Cliveden to escape the “dead house” trap and become a model for planning in historic residences.

At Cliveden, interpreters developed an interpretive plan that allowed them to find unique ways to interact with guests without overwhelming them with information. While there was a wealth of information available and many historic contexts into which Cliveden fits, interpreters selected a single historic context and created a narrative that played to the strengths of the residence. Docents at Cliveden tell guests about the Chew family, the part the family took in securing the legacy of their residence, and how the Chews chose to interpret the significance of their home in the Revolution.⁶⁷ The residence tour not only gives a sense of everyday life in the eighteenth-century, it also explores the interruption of that life as was created by the Revolution, particularly the British occupation of Philadelphia. Not only is the tour creating a feeling of the everyday at Cliveden, they are encouraging guests to see how the Revolution disrupted it. In addition, guests are shown where the Battle of Germantown occurred. The Chews preserved the home so that the damage wrought by the battle would be readily evident; repairs were only made where absolutely necessary. It would have been easy for interpreters at Cliveden to make the residence a shrine to the battle and only show guests where the battle occurred, much as the Chews did for many years. Instead, interpreters have created a challenging tour that encourages guests to consider much more complicated issues than just the battle. This has been accomplished by encouraging

⁶⁷ MacKenzie Lloyd, 210-230.

guests to think not just about everyday life, but the method used by historians to piece together their understanding of the residents and occupants.

In addition to creating a unique and textured tour experience, docents lead guests into understanding the source of the tour information. Guests are not given letters or journals to peruse, but they are informed of the extensive documentary collections of the Chews which are available at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Docents explain their hope that through this partnership with the Historical Society they will learn new things about the home and the family to share with guests. At different points throughout the tour, docents explain how sources have been used to understand the family and interpret the home. This is evident even in the small commemorative brochure for sale in the gift shop, which proclaims “At this rare place, original architecture, artifacts and family papers converge with a great moment in history to create a vivid picture of the past.”⁶⁸ This makes it clear to guests that Cliveden is an opportunity to experience real history in the place it occurred, using the words of the historical actors themselves. The Cliveden tour is different from the typical historic residence tour in its transparency and effectiveness, and should be a model for the development of an effective experience to impact public memory and use the everyday in an unexpected manner to inform and encourage historical exploration.

Many residences use documents to improve tour programs and engage guests, but not all those that do so are as successful as Cliveden. An example of a residence that endeavors to make a successful effort in this area is Stenton, which is also in

⁶⁸ National Trust for Historic Preservation, “Cliveden” (National Trust for Historic Preservation: 1997), 1.

Germantown, Pennsylvania. Stenton is an unusual site in that it has many documents from several generations of residents, male and female, and as well as from prominent men of the time that would be recognizable to guests. There are many things about Stenton that are good for the heritage tourist. The residence is beautifully maintained, almost entirely extant from the eighteenth century with many outbuildings, and in possession of a fantastic collection of period decorative arts original to the residence. Docents discuss the use of many of these artifacts, address significant elements of the architecture such as the entrance hall and the symmetry of the façade, and they note the importance of Germantown to nearby Philadelphia as well. These are all important conversations to have about this country estate. These ideas are encompassed in the interpretive plan for the property, developed in spring of 2003 to improve presentation at the site. The guided tour is meant to emphasize material culture and the intact quality of the site.⁶⁹ While this interpretive plan seems logical and appropriate on paper, the implementation is less effective. The problem comes in the tour of the house itself and the integration of the documents in a meaningful way. The tour struggles to use documents to create the feeling of life at Stenton. Indeed, the feel of the house itself is one of age, silence, and darkness. While Stenton has undergone an interpretive planning process and used primary sources to develop their residence tour, a “dead house” experience for guests is what they have created.

⁶⁹Stephan Hague and Laura Keim Stutman, “Stenton: The Interpretive Plan,” The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, <http://www.stenton.org/research/plan.cfm> (accessed July 13, 2009).

The primary reason that Stenton presents itself as a “dead house” to guests is the property management by the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The property is shuttered from the inside using the eighteenth-century shutters typical in country houses of this period. These are highly effective shutters that make the residence dark and not a little creepy. This is not the welcoming feel that a historic residence should be providing to the public. Each room must be unshuttered as the tour progresses, and then reshuttered before it continues. This is a process that saps any feeling of light or life from visitors. Stenton’s mission statement and interpretive plan discusses a focus on interpreting “life in the eighteenth century,” this is accomplished through individual staged vignettes by room, but the lack of cohesion between the rooms makes the vignettes seem artificial. The continued shuttering and unshuttering is disruptive to the narrative, the tour, and the experience. And it is obvious that the actual eighteenth-century occupants did not live in this way, further detracting from any sense of authenticity.

While the website for Stenton claims that the residence is the most “believable historic residence in Philadelphia,” based on the experience provided it is difficult to believe that anyone lived there.⁷⁰ The residence lacks vibrancy and cohesion. Guests do not have the ability to absorb a sense of everyday life as staged in the residence’s rooms and so cannot make connections to their own experiences. The dark and disconnected nature of the residence and tour are not believable. Interpreters have not staged an eighteenth-century life that is realistic, which makes it distant, unappealing, and largely

⁷⁰ The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, “Stenton,” NSCDA/PA, www.Stenton.org (accessed July 6, 2009).

unbelievable. Ultimately, the tour is ineffective in its educational goals. Similarly, the interpretation of the site based on the documents available is also problematic and does not use the best set of documents for the job.

According to the Interpretive Plan for Stenton, the primary period of interpretation and person of interpretation is James Logan, who constructed the residence and worked as an agent for the Penn family. James Logan was an important man to the colony of Pennsylvania and significant to the history of Stenton because he commissioned it. However, he may not be the best focus for the tour. The better person of interpretation based on the available set of documents would be Deborah Norris Logan. In some ways, docents seem to sense this in part. Docents lean toward Deborah Logan on the upper-level of the residence tour and use her documents to create a better tour. She was a prolific writer even before her marriage, she loved Stenton, and she spent many years documenting her life there.⁷¹ Focusing on Deborah rather than James Logan, would bring life to a dead space.

The interpretive plan at Stenton is not wrong in its ideas or assertions as to the significance of the residence and its inhabitants. It was developed through a long process that involved much reflection and sought the opinion of many professionals. Without a visit to the residence, the interpretive plan seems rational and executable based on the work completed. Upon a visit to Stenton, however, it is clear that the plan has been taken too literally, with elements of the plan, even its language, permeating the tour as given by

⁷¹ The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, "Stenton-The Interpretive Plan," NSCDA/PA, <http://www.stenton.org/research/plan.cfm> (accessed July 10, 2009).

docents. The issue at Stenton is that despite all of the careful preparation in a manner recommended as good methodology by many public historians, the plan does not work. The tour feels stiff, stilted, and contrived, and the house overall feels dead. In the end, visitors get the impression that James Logan lived in this place and he was an important man. This does not constitute a profound addition to historical memory, nor does it encourage heritage tourists to think beyond a very localized and simplistic narrative. Guests are not challenged at Stenton by a textured narrative. As Stenton progressed through the interpretive planning process in a logical manner to develop this tour, it may be that Stenton is really an example of the need for new direction in the way tours are developed and the way interpretive plans are made. The tour at Stenton, although developed through an educational directive derived from an interpretive plan that is just over five years old, already feels passé. One significant reason for this impression is the insistence on depicting a white man's world of power and influence. The same limited story, told many places, in many ways, told here again in a place with so much more potential.

The interpreters at Stenton are obviously familiar with newer historical trends; they seem to be quite aware and interested in providing the best history possible. The tour and its focus on James Logan were developed out of an exhaustive process, the final outcome of which was a determination that this was the "song the house was singing." The problem is that the focus for Stenton has become about the white masculine power structure of colonial and early America. This is evidenced clearly even in their brochure. The Colonial Dames tell visitors through the website and the brochure that Stenton is

worth a visit because “Ben Franklin thought it was worth the trip.”⁷² The majority of the Philadelphia heritage experience trades on the significance of Franklin to the city—he is the ultimate Philadelphia currency. The Colonial Dames need to break out of this cliché and discuss why Stenton is really worth the trip—it provides something different, more interesting, and can provide better history than many of the other sites in the area when paired with the right tour.

To develop a better tour and provide something new, the proprietors of Stenton need to eliminate elements of their tour that are not working. They need to shift the focus of the site away from the elite white male power narrative and create something more modern and relevant to today’s guest—guests who have seen many sites repeating tired, inaccurate narratives and are looking for something new, challenging, and authentic. The first thing to consider is location. Stenton was located in eighteenth-century Germantown, not eighteenth-century Philadelphia, a distinction that had meaning at that time. There are a number of extant resources in Germantown, each telling its own story and adding to an overall idea of the significance of the area from the early colonial period through the Industrial Revolution. Stenton is one of several eighteenth-century country houses in Germantown, which include Cliveden and Wyck, leaving Stenton with the need to distinguish itself from the other two. All three residences should provide something different to ensure the survival and visitorship of all three. Stenton must provide a different perspective to bring in the visitors; it must lure guests away from Philadelphia

⁷² The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. *Stenton: Country House of James Logan* (Germantown, Pennsylvania: Stenton, 2009) <http://www.Stenton.org> (accessed July 22, 2009).

with its bells, halls, and cheese steaks. Yes, it lured Franklin out of the city, but why would it draw a modern tourist? Why stop in Germantown in lieu of Valley Forge? Why go to Stenton when you can go to Cliveden? Stenton must exploit its location and the significance of the location. This has already been accomplished in part by joining the “Historic Germantown: Freedom’s Backyard” program, a grouping of fourteen significant sites in the area.⁷³ Stenton has the opportunity to fill the gaps left by other sites, specifically Cliveden. The National Trust uses Cliveden to discuss very specific issues which leaves room for others to be interpreted by Wyck, Stenton, and other locations. The Chew family and their presence and mission dominate the tour at Cliveden; the Logan family and their place in Germantown can offer a different perspective that will assist guests in understanding the significance of the area. Why and when did people live in Germantown? How was it different from Philadelphia? Such questions and their answers are vital. Stenton is presented largely as an island on the land, not as a part of a community, an issue that must be remedied. No one understood themselves independent of a larger community in the eighteenth century. The community provided status, power, and protection. In this case, it can provide Stenton with relevance and context.

Another issue to be remedied at Stenton is the focus on James Logan. Logan was a significant man, but the focus on him at this residence falls flat. Public historians cannot always cling to an individual to give them purpose, it is sometimes unrealistic. Yes, Logan was the patriarch of his family and an important man in the colony, but he does

⁷³Historic Germantown Preserved, “Historic Germantown: Freedom’s Backyard,” Historic Germantown, <http://www.freedomsbackyard.com> (accessed July 23, 2009).

not have significant presence to carry the tour. Interpreters should look beyond individuals as the key to interpretation and instead think of other ways to create significance and resonance for modern guests. This is perhaps the perfect location to lead guests into consideration of race, class, and gender and the intersection of these elements within a single meta-narrative at one focal point—the residence. Stenton was a residence full of people in the eighteenth century, people who lived their lives in a great home that was constructed to convey presence and reputation to others. Guests should be encouraged to consider the residence’s significance on the landscape. This can best be achieved with an eighteenth and early nineteenth century context that corresponds with the life of Deborah Norris Logan and George Logan (James Logan’s grandson) and their time in as the primary residents of Stenton.

The interpretive plan for Stenton argues that Logan’s son, William, and grandson, George, never reached “the same heights of influence or importance” as the patriarch and provides evidence for their relative exclusion.⁷⁴ Ironically, this is the very thing that makes them the superior candidates for interpretation. James Logan was a great man, significant to the colony, well connected, a prominent Quaker; there is too much to say and it all says the same thing—James Logan had power. His residence shows this power; his furnishings and his list of acquaintances are evidence of his influence. His power in large measure died with him. This is why Stenton is a “dead house”. The struggles of William Logan and George and Deborah Logan are much more compelling and open up questions that guests will be interested to learn about and have answered.

⁷⁴ “Stenton-The Interpretive Plan,” Major Themes II- James Logan: The Central Figure in Stenton’s History (accessed July 22, 2009).

The inclusion of both James and Deborah on the same tour—as currently exists—is confusing to guests who begin to assume they are of the same generation and had the same ideas and concerns, which is not true. The focus on James as an individual should be replaced by the story of the later three Logans and their place in the house. Rather than an individual, guests would be interested to hear the story of a family, something that they can use to compare to their own family and understand what life was like in a family scenario. The sources available for Deborah Logan are extensive and begin before her marriage into the family. The integration of Deborah Logan’s documents allows visitors to consider less traditional contexts and narratives than typically presented on historic residence tours.

Stenton appears the perfect opportunity based on the sources to consider gender and race specifically within the home. The current interpretive plan mentions the importance of a slave girl, Dinah, as a significant contributor to Stenton and its history. A tour could easily be developed that leads guests through Stenton and assists them in experiencing the residence as Deborah and Dinah did. This would certainly be a different perspective than that provided elsewhere in Germantown, and it provides a unique opportunity based on available sources for an understanding of the experience of these women independent of each other, and as their lives were intertwined. Deborah and Dinah had lives that were separate and very different concerns. They each would understand the residence in a different way. Room by room, docents could bring guests to an understanding of how each person viewed the space. A location of leisure for one could easily be a location of toil for another. The slave experience is not always

interpreted well in Philadelphia and its environs because of the Quaker anti-slavery ideal, despite the fact that the Logans, Penns, and others chose to see past it to their own purposes and own slaves despite their Quaker faith. Several other locations in Germantown glorify the work of Quakers on the Underground Railroad and suggest a general Quaker commitment to freedom. Stenton is a residence that can instead give a perspective on enslavement in Pennsylvania.

In addition to altering perception of slavery, a tour that highlights Deborah and Dinah encourages guests to rethink everyday gender relationships in the Logan household. Both William and George Logan had specific relationships to Deborah and Dinah, and both women would be at the mercy of these men at different moments in their lives. Everyday family relationships are not consistently interpreted at eighteenth-century heritage sites. Stenton provides this opportunity. For example, the interpretive plan and the current tour introduce eighteenth-century child rearing as a topic for guest consideration. The interpretive plan refers to Dinah's struggle to keep her family together under enslavement, however she may also have had an important role in rearing the Logan children. The alteration of the residence tour to consider the female perspective more consciously would alter perception of this very basic function of everyday life, a powerful moment to make a connection with guests. While Dinah and Deborah are not the easy or most obvious choice when looking at the framing of the interpretive plan, the use of their stories and the sources associated with them would provide the best guest

experience and the best history associated with Stenton.⁷⁵ Changing the tour program to one focused on Deborah and Dinah changes the entire dynamic of the use of the residence for tourism purposes.

The way the residence is shown and the way people move through the residence would need to be changed. Rather than beginning the tour at the front door, the tour would need to begin in the rear of the dwelling in the ancillary structures and show guests the way Dinah would enter the home and what her experience with the spaces would be. The back stairs, the work rooms, and the way the family rooms appeared to a slave. The tour could easily stop in the large entry hall to shift focus to the white inhabitants of the dwelling and the story of Deborah and George Logan. The upstairs rooms in particular held special meaning to Deborah Norris Logan, as discussed in her writings. The concept of gendered space, as exemplified by this country house, is entirely new for guests and represents a departure from the heritage tour they are used to encountering. In this way guests are given a new perspective, something different than they have normally encountered in historic house museums, and an experience that will make them think of the other country houses they visit differently as they begin to actively seek for themselves the spaces that they learned at Stenton were associated with a specific race, class, or gender.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ “Stenton-The Interpretive Plan,” Major Themes IV-The Women of Stenton, Deborah, Dinah, and the Dames (accessed July 22, 2009).

⁷⁶ For a discussion of the gendering of eighteenth-century spaces see Jessica Cross, “Mansions, Men, Women and the Creation of Multiple Publics in Eighteenth-Century British North America,” *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 2 (1999): 385-408.

Shifting focus away from an individual and instead to the interactions of a group of historical actors can be successful for a number of reasons. Firstly, the focus on a single individual is in most cases artificial. In discussing residences that have been integral parts of families for hundreds of years, to focus on a single inhabitant leaves guests with more questions than answers. This also leads to difficulties in furnishing the home. Is it possible to reflect only a single individual in the residence? Particularly in an eighteenth-century country home where gendering of spaces had become increasingly fashionable and necessary, it makes little sense to interpret the residence around an individual. Many guests are looking to make a connection with the former inhabitants, mothers, craftsmen, children, and slaves all will hold interest for guests looking for resonance with their own lives. Many heritage tourists are traveling with families and seek to understand how families interacted with each other in an earlier time. In order to make these tours more meaningful and more consistent with the historical narrative, historic house museums must understand that a focus on single historical actors is not useful. It is not impossible for a single historical actor to carry a tour, sometimes it can work, but more often than not a group approach will be more useful. Every historic house has its own unique set of documents and issues to convey, so in some cases an individual is the most interesting to telling the story. However, in many cases this tendency to interpret individuals becomes a crutch holding up a feeble narrative, an ill-defined context, and a weak educational experience.

The eighteenth-century “dead houses” that exist across the country are not without viable solutions. It is fully possible to create an experience that is meaningful for

guests, no matter what the obstacles. Some residences may have very few furnishings, some may have very few documents, some may be reconstructions, but these are not insurmountable difficulties. Residences such as Pennsbury Manor in Pennsylvania, for instance, have found creative and useful ways to overcome these obstacles and create great experiences for visitors. Pennsbury Manor is a reconstruction of a location that has limited historical connection with its period and persons of interpretation that has nonetheless created a vibrant tour experience for guests. The development of an effective tour is entirely the work of public history professionals working to lead guests into greater understanding and dedicated to impacting public memory. Pennsbury Manor proves that the development of a tour with a textured narrative that engages guests and encourages inquiry is not dependent upon extant original structures or availability of furnishings.

Pennsbury Manor is a reconstruction of the home of William Penn, located in Morrisville, Pennsylvania. The narrative presented at Pennsbury has benefited greatly from the use of documents to reconstruct the late-seventeenth-and early-eighteenth-century experience of the early Quaker inhabitants and their great country houses. At first glance, Pennsbury, appears disappointing to those looking for “real” or “authentic” history; the entire site is a reconstruction and appears to have been constructed mainly for the benefit of school groups. However, once the tour begins it is clear that the proprietors of Pennsbury—the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission—are committed to their educational goals and are very honest with guests about what they are seeing. They begin their tour with a film about William Penn, the “holy experiment”, and the

reconstruction at Pennsbury. Some of the buildings on the grounds were constructed to educate, not because they were original to the site. Docents are very clear and open about this fact. They interpret the buildings as they would have been used at other local country estates, and explain the purpose of these reconstructions for the education of local primary school children. By docents always remaining mindful of the need to educate and explaining the importance of the educational mission, adult visitors are given the opportunity to consider the importance of heritage tourism in a new light. Beyond their own educational experiences, guests are able to consider what heritage sites mean, what they offer to the community, and their importance to preserving national heritage.

Interpreting everyday life at Pennsbury is challenging. William Penn did not reside in Pennsylvania very often during his life and only one of his children was born in the colony. Instead, interpreters do the most they can with what they have. They discuss the significance of the furnishings and construction; they discuss Penn's employees; and they attempt to assist visitors in understanding the Quaker way of life. The most effective tool at Pennsbury among their many educational programs is one entitled "Living History Theatre," where costumed interpreters discuss small incidents in eighteenth-century everyday life with visitors. These costumed interpreters are not wandering the grounds or working diligently at tasks; rather they are there to provide an individual glimpse into eighteenth-century life. Interpreters at Pennsbury are mindful of the fact that everyday life did not actually occur in their residence. It was never really a residence. They have overcome this obstacle by being honest about the sites limits and then overcoming them and by creating a sense of life through the Living History Theater and the staging of the

rooms. The Living History Theater programs cover a range of ideas and are presented on different days, so new experiences can be had. One example of this program covers child rearing and the importance of making a sensible marriage match for teenagers. This particular program splits the tour group into two, and each small group has an individual conversation with the parents of the intended bride and the parents of the intended groom. The costumed interpreters discuss child rearing in the Quaker manner, the importance of the Quaker faith to both young people, the reasons for their approval of the match, and their concerns about it. The interpreters encourage visitors to participate and to ask questions by engaging in a conversation rather than a lecture or lesson. They ask for opinions and advice on child rearing and provide a great enhancement to the Pennsbury experience. When the day is done and guests have gone home, they are more likely to remember these facts of everyday life in the eighteenth century than the fact that the site is a reconstruction. This is because the interpretation of everyday life is powerful and is used at Pennsbury in an innovative manner to ensure a positive and impactful guest experience in a location that is not actually historic in an eighteenth-century sense.

So despite the fact that Pennsbury is a reconstruction from the 1930s, whose most famous proprietor almost never lived there, and almost all the furnishings are typical rather than original, they have managed to create a meaningful experience that is important for its work in historical accuracy and its encouragement of thought, education, and understanding. They are doing the work of altering public memory at a site that did not participate fully in that historical experience. In addition to the work done with tourists, interpreters are also mindful of the importance of local history to a community.

Pennsbury connects with the local community as much as it does with tourists through the development of a community outreach program. This is accomplished through a website and many local education programs that encourage the community to celebrate and participate in their historic past. In the summer of 2009 the website included a call for assistance from descendants of certain local families, a variety of programs about life in the eighteenth century, colonial summer camps, and workshops on the importance and method of preserving family documents. Pennsbury's website does not just provide history, it places the manor in the community in a way that makes it valuable, meaningful, and assures its continuance for many generations.⁷⁷ This local element is extremely important and perhaps the most effective aspect of Pennsbury. The work of public memory can be accomplished everyday by historic house museums encouraging tourists to think differently about the American meta-narrative, but at Pennsbury, interpreters are also encouraging an alteration in local memory. Pennsbury has constructed a place for itself within the community as an outpost of local history and memory. It is a location that is historic in spirit, if not in reality, and is a symbol of the importance of the historical narrative to people in the county. History is alive for both local residents and out-of-town visitors at Pennsbury, allowing it to escape the "dead house" problem.

The development of good tours and houses that avoid the "dead house" trap is challenging and difficult for public historians, no matter the site. Many historic homes that reflect the eighteenth century have lost their focus or become so tangled in the many

⁷⁷ Doug Miller, ed., "Pennsbury Manor," The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in association with the Pennsbury Society, <http://www.pennsburymanor.org> (accessed July 6, 2009).

threads of history evident at the site that they are no longer clear and concise tools for education. The result is that many historic homes do not produce effective history that interacts in a positive way with public memory, instead allowing the challenges of the site to overwhelm them or they become complacent and satisfied with the same tour that has been serving the public for years. The key to developing better tours and experiences is to ensure that the historical narrative is sound, that sources are being used in a productive way, everyday life is effectively portrayed for guests, and that interpreters remain mindful of the public memory. The explicit use of sources can allow guests to understand that men and women in the eighteenth century talked about their homes, enjoyed living in them, had opinions about the homes of others, and that these sources have informed the creation of the tours they are experiencing. Effective tours must reinforce this sense of life. Residences that are not engaging the public in deeper and more textured narratives, instead serving merely as material culture collections, are problematic and damaging to heritage tourism as an industry. Heritage tourists want more, they have seen the stale tours of residences that never change, never provide new information, and that reinforce the expected whitewashed, masculine elite meta-narrative. According to exit surveys at historic house museums the average person retains only three to seven pieces of information conveyed throughout the tour.⁷⁸ This is a problem; this means that patrons lose focus. There are ways to counteract this condition by creating engaging tours that encourage people to think about a space as a location of life rather than just looking at it superficially. Finally, historic house museums must be good

⁷⁸ MacKenzie Lloyd, 210.

neighbors encouraging investment by the community to further educational goals.

Rotating programs and local history work will encourage positive interaction with the site beyond the school tour. These challenges are not easy to meet in every case. They require thorough planning, and a willingness to alter programs that do not work and to even make small-scale changes to those that do. These efforts must be considered and accomplished through the use of sources and community investment in order to ensure a consistent and positive historical narrative and an enduring impact on public memory.

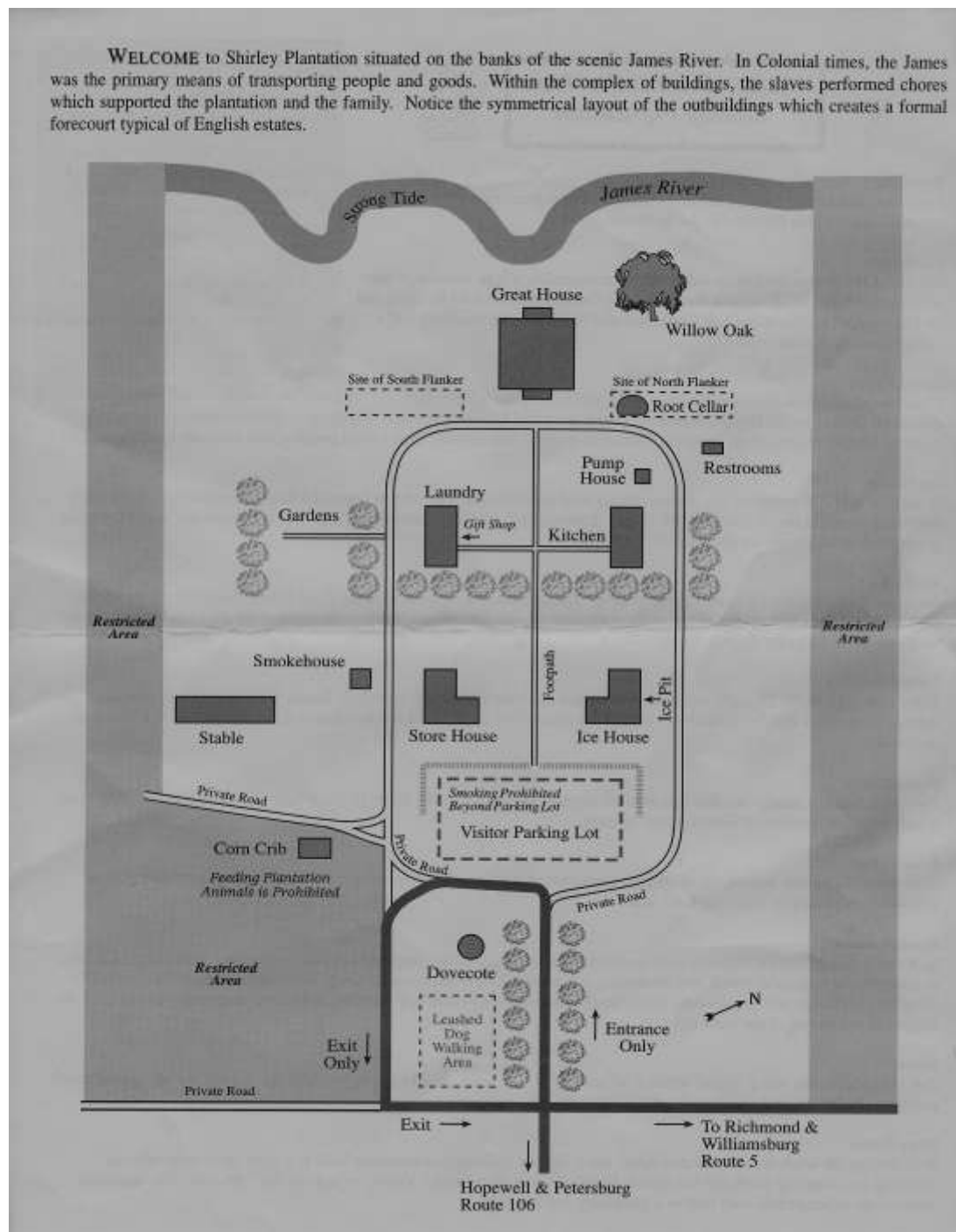


Figure 3.2 Shirley Plantation visitor's map⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Visitor Orientation Map: Shirley Plantation, Side B.

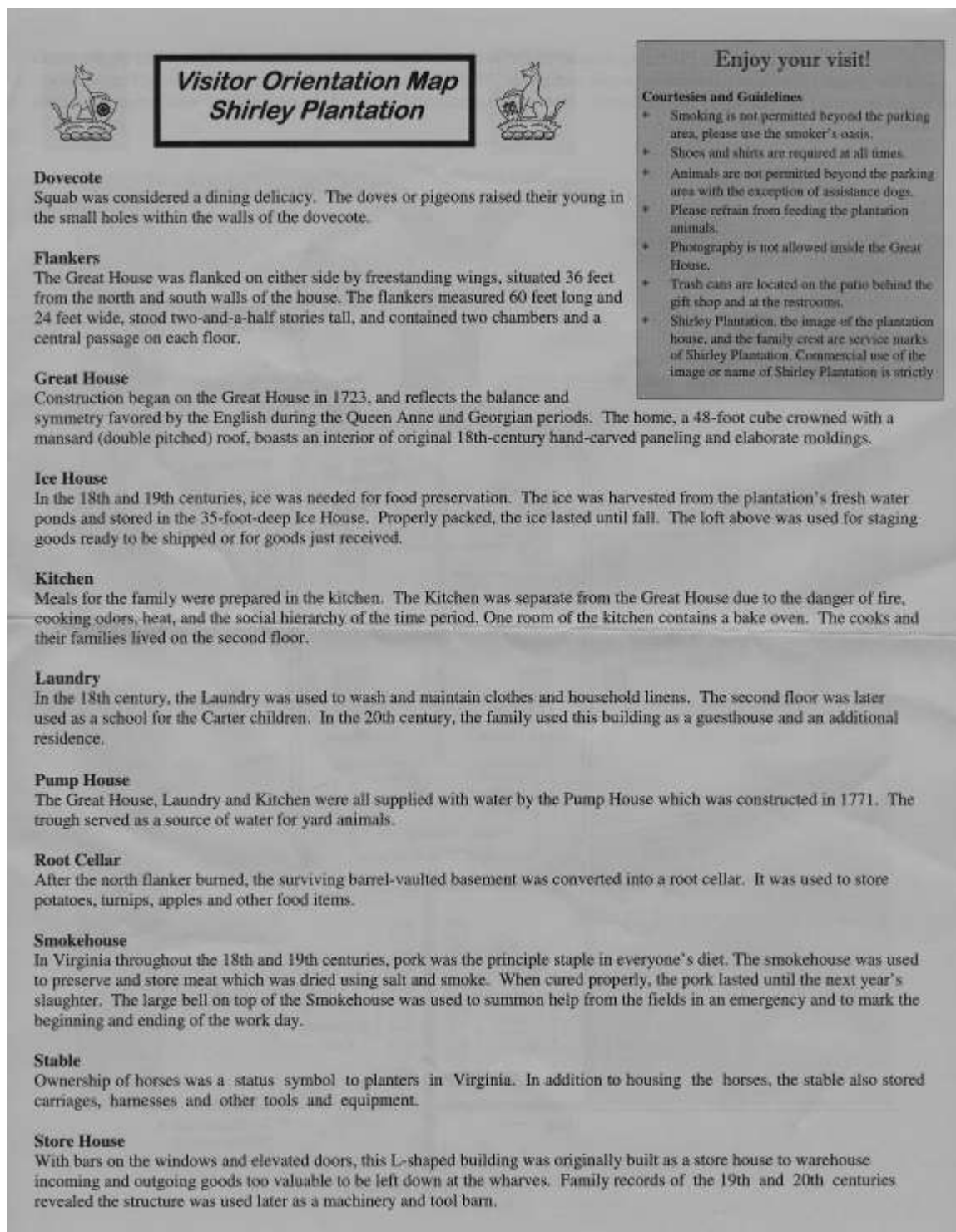


Figure 3.3 Shirley Plantation Handout⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Visitor Orientation Map: Shirley Plantation, Side A.

Chapter 4: Public Memory in the Urban Environment

The urban environment is an excellent medium to develop the theme of everyday life in the eighteenth century. The urban environment in the eighteenth century was vibrant, exciting, and multi-faceted, much as the modern urban experience. Because urban interpretation is both unlooked for and unexpected by heritage tourists, its effective implementation has the ability to be both surprising and productive as an educational tool. However, developing this effectual interpretation in cities is not a simple endeavor. Urban interpretation meets challenges that are not encountered in other interpretive environments. Most significant eighteenth-century cities have evolved since their founding and continue to be important locations of modern business. As such, traffic, development, and modern business activity complicate the interpretation of the city as a historic venue. Consequently, in most cities, historical narrative exists within structures. Each structure serves as a virtual history oasis in a sea of modernity, but once guests exit the site, that history is silenced again. The carefully crafted historical narrative is then quickly overwhelmed by the ebb and flow of modern life, which seems distant and unrelated to the fleeting heritage experience. Even on streets in historic districts, where nearly every detail from sidewalks to street trees evokes a particular time and place, historic structures seem “boxes of history.” The history is locked up inside for researchers and docents to unlock and only available to the people when the doors are opened wide. Public historians must expand this outdated mode of inaccessible or compartmentalized urban history to allow visitors and residents to appreciate that history is effusive and accessible. It should be located on the sidewalks, in the streets and gardens, even in the

alleys and gutters as easily as in the residential and commercial structures. By expanding the public understanding of where history can exist and how it can be understood, public historians have an opportunity to alter public memory. The city becomes a key element in educating the public on the nature of everyday life in the eighteenth century, making history about more than the single events and significant characters that typically populate the meta-narrative of American history. By expanding history into the streets and outside the doors of historic structures, heritage tourists will be able to glimpse history as realistically lived, a valuable tool in the alteration of popular memory.

Philadelphia, an important eighteenth-century city, has the ability to create a significant narrative in support of historic everyday life. Heritage tourists can spend a full day immersed in the vast historic resources of the downtown area. Currently, many begin their visit at the Independence Visitor Center and obtain a map of the Independence Historic Park and surrounding environs (see Figure 4.1). Walking the streets, visitors have access to significant eighteenth-century sites such as Independence Hall, the Betsy Ross House, and the Liberty Bell. However, there is a stark contrast between the visitor experience of the historic city and reality of the historic city as displayed in the ample primary sources discussing the area. Looking at the map of the historic area, historic structures are marked for visitors to encourage their exploration of the city. Each historic structure, residential, commercial, or religious, has an interpretive sign and some are open for tours. However each structure fails in its interpretive sign and within tour programs to connect to other structures or to acknowledge the journey to the site. The city streets are not subject to interpretation. In Philadelphia, as in many other historic cities, only the

structures are interpreted. As guests progress through the city on the streets, past gardens and through parks, they encounter historic markers that indicate why certain locations appear on their map, but not how to understand the historical context of each site or the map itself. This lack of context is significant in how it limits the ability to create real historical understanding for guests.

By denying the importance of the city itself as a historical entity and instead interpreting it as a concentration of historic structures without a context, guests do not have the ability to understand the historical significance of the area or make valuable additions to their historical memory. In order for the urban environment to be effectively interpreted in a manner that educates and challenges visitors, a citywide context must be developed. This citywide context already appears in the scholarly literature as an abstraction but must be translated for guests into a narrative that takes into account all aspects of their physical environment today. Large-scale interpretation in this manner is a challenge for public historians working to create viable narratives in areas like cities and historic districts. The best narrative to employ in these areas is one that integrates the streets and gardens as meaningful and significant locations along with their attendant historic structures because this was eighteenth-century reality. Creating an understanding of the city akin to that of eighteenth-century residents will assist visitors in understanding everyday life in an eighteenth-century urban center. It will expose them to an aspect of the historical narrative that is not well-defined in public memory, changing their perspective overall to one that considers history in a larger and more realistic context.

The streets of the eighteenth century were alive. They were full of people, ideas, and transactions of business. The corners, the gardens, the porticos, all aspects of the streets, were bustling with people of different races and classes coming together to define American society. The urban environment of eighteenth-century America exhibited a different social culture than that experienced in more rural locations. This was due to immense changes undergone in the cities during the middle and late portions of the century. Cities had expanded and changed, population and building density had intensified, and residents began to create a more cosmopolitan culture reminiscent of the best cities abroad. Men and women inhabiting and visiting the great American cities of the eighteenth century participated in a social network that responded to climate and the urban environment, fashioning a social world that incorporated the streets, gardens, and commercial districts as easily as parlors, chambers, or taverns might.

Both men and women in urban locations took great pleasure in the streets. In a city that was busy and well-populated, the streets provided a welcome place to stroll, see and be seen, and conduct visits. The culture of visiting was important to polite society in the cities of colonial America—Philadelphia, Charleston, and Boston among others—as it was in most of the British Empire. Men and women made a daily habit of calling on friends, or waiting at home for guests, according to the conventions of politeness. However, visiting in the city was not confined to time spent in a parlor, or even in an upstairs room as was popular. The outdoors became a frequent location for interaction in the urban environment. Transcending its purpose as a mode of conveyance, residents frequently made the streets and gardens of the city the most popular of destinations. The

climates of Philadelphia and Charleston made this particularly appealing in the summertime, when heat and humidity during the day made homes unpleasant. To combat the problem of potentially uncomfortable interiors and take advantage of summer breezes, residents spent time outdoors. One female correspondent explained that at the start of spring “both books and needles are thrown aside – for the pleasure of walking and observing the progress of vegetation.”⁸¹ City streets and public gardens worked together to create an urban environment that catered to the needs of the inhabitants of the city, allowing them access to goods and services as well as social interactions with men and women of similar station.⁸²

In Philadelphia, residents of all stations used the streets for both business and pleasure. However, for the upper class, the urban environment had a significant meaning attached to civility and gentility. These urban dwellers lived in a city that by the late eighteenth century compared favorably with those in England. Gentlemen and ladies were a vibrant part of the urban community, frequently appearing on the streets in the process of completing the necessary daily transactions. Writings from city dwellers

⁸¹ Sally James Wister to Catherine Franklin Sharples, July 25, 1785, Catherine Franklin Sharples Family Papers, 1709-1866, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. Hereafter cited as Sharples, HSP.

⁸² For more information on the eighteenth-century urban environment see: Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Susan E. Klepp, *Philadelphia in Transition: A Demographic History of the City and its Occupational Groups, 1720-1830* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989); A. Michal McMahon, “‘Small Matters’: Benjamin Franklin, Philadelphia, and the ‘Progress of Cities,’” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 116, no.2 (April 1992): 157-182; John W. Reps, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1965); Sharon V. Salinger, “Spaces Inside and Outside in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 26, no. 1 (Summer, 1995): 1-31; and Mary M. Schweitzer, “The Spatial Organization of Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia, 1790,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 24, no. 1 (Summer, 1993): 31-57.

included discussions of pleasant strolls, enjoyment of gardens, and meetings with friends as soon as weather permitted. One new resident to the city remarked on the typical Philadelphia evening as “supping late + chatting a little after sometimes a short walk after dark which is much the practice here from the extreme heat of the day.”⁸³ Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker, a prolific diarist, described weekly occurrences during the time before her marriage of walks that seemed to take the entire day. Some days began with a morning walk with stops for tea, shopping, meeting with friends, and eventually returning home for dinner. In addition to the social benefits of the urban environment, women in Philadelphia were able to use the streets to transact the business of household management as many of the necessary goods and services were within easy walking distance.⁸⁴

Interior rooms remained a location of both social and private life, much as they were in the country, but the prevalence of the exterior changed perceptions of what activities resided in specific locations. Activities that otherwise may have been more private in other locales became more public as they spilled out into the city. The best example is courtship. Not confined to parlors or private residences, courtship became an activity that could be carried out in a more public manner. Both men and women in Charleston and Philadelphia used the streets and public locations such as gardens and public assemblies to meet potential marriage partners and for later rendezvous. Historian

⁸³ Journals of Ann Head Warder, 1786 – 1787, Ann Head Warder Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA . Hereafter cited as Warder, HSP.

⁸⁴ Elaine Foreman Crane, ed., *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 15, 19, 23. These are but a few examples of the extensive time spent exploring the neighborhood.

Carl Lounsbury points out in his analysis of architectural design in Charleston that “Public walks, long rooms, libraries, and museums provided places and opportunities for members of polite society to display their charms, beauty, and good breeding and to find suitable matrimonial partners.”⁸⁵ It was not unusual for girls on walks in the city to meet eligible beaux and bring them home to tea, or be accompanied home to dinner. These meetings were sometimes chance, and sometimes planned. While these activities seemed to some to evince an overall lack of decorum, social transactions in the streets of the cities were also subject to the rules of politeness, which were carefully watched over by the female social network. The constant activity of the streets and its significance to eighteenth-century urban dwellers, if properly interpreted, has great potential to create a stimulating and textured experience for heritage tourists.

Many of the urban structures, streets, and gardens of the eighteenth century have remained intact and retain much of their original character in modern cities. However, it is the historic structures that have garnered the most attention as a point of connection between the heritage tourist and the location of popular memory. Charleston, Philadelphia, and Boston, in the present, are locations that benefit greatly from heritage tourism. The problem that arises in these locations is that not all of what is available to the public is effective; the narrative available is relatively small in scale and available in limited increments to be experienced only in historic structures. The experience of the streets is greatly overlooked in these locations. While the cities make excellent use of the

⁸⁵ Carl Lounsbury, “The Dynamic of Architectural Design in Eighteenth-Century Charleston and the Lowcountry,” in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture: Volume 7, Exploring Everyday Landscapes*, ed. Annemarie Adams and Sally McMurry (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 62.

streets for walking or carriage tours, the streets are merely a mode of conveyance, which was certainly never true in the eighteenth century. The challenge for these cities is to integrate the streets as a meaningful location within their existing narratives and to create a sense of everyday city life as it existed in the eighteenth century.

Philadelphia in its present form is a good example of a city that has changed little in usage since the eighteenth century, despite changes in architecture and technology. While some zoning has changed, many residential and commercial corridors that existed in the eighteenth century remain, some retaining their original use. Others have been preserved as part of the heritage park, but remain a useful tool for urban interpretation. Historian Billy G. Smith has argued that the urban plan of the historic city of Philadelphia lent itself to the prevalence for walking among the upper and middling classes. Smith describes the organization of the city as a series of concentric circles around the main market and business districts, with the upper class inhabiting the closest circle to the origins of their wealth. The farther away from this urban core residences and businesses were, the more likely they were to be inhabited by lesser and lesser degrees of wealth and respectability.⁸⁶ The implication of this organization for visiting and the overall social culture was great, as the arrangement concentrated neighborhoods of men and women, occupying positions of similar station and influence, who engaged in visits with each other, all within easy walking distance. Taking a stroll through the best neighborhoods would be accessible, easy, and, in some cases, necessary to satisfy social obligations.

⁸⁶ Billy G. Smith, "Philadelphia: Athens of America," in *Life in Early Philadelphia: Documents from the Revolutionary and Early National Periods* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1995), 11.

This organization also made it possible for both male and female residents to acquire goods and services easily, without the need for carriages.

Modern guests and local residents should understand that the way they are experiencing and using the city in the modern sense is quite similar to the everyday usage of the streets in the eighteenth century. They are strolling to visit residential structures, in essence visiting as men and women would at that time. From there, they may visit a garden to take air and meet up with friends or neighbors. They may also take the streets into commercial areas to satisfy their daily needs for food and retail. While the food and retail has changed in character, its location, proximity to residential areas, and dependence upon the streets for patrons has not. Modern visitors have the opportunity to experience and understand the city from the everyday perspective. Interpreters must exploit these similarities to encourage guests to understand the past as a viable time where the need for goods, services, and community were sought at the neighborhood level. Many guests understand history as a series of individual and significant events that caused American history to progress over time. In a city setting, guests have the ability to understand history in a radically different manner, as an everyday occurrence that was punctuated by many of the same needs and concerns for food, shelter and companionship that are experienced in a modern sense. Into this everyday life came significant events that changed lives and perspectives, altering not just a later historical narrative, but day to day life for people. This change in historical perspective is dramatic and changes guest perception of the historical narrative.

While discussion of similarity in the everyday is significant, it is also important for guests to understand difference. The use of urban spaces in the modern sense is quite different, even if their location is not. Areas such as streets, gardens, and alleys had different meanings associated with them in the eighteenth century, meanings significant to daily life in a way that is not evident in the present. Modern streets and gardens in many urban areas have lost their historical meaning appearing to guests as something to tread upon or a pleasing view. They are not seen as outlets of life and locations of culture and community in many urban areas as they were in an earlier time. The definition of neighborhood and community that exists in the modern sense is largely a product of the culture of the 1950s and 60s, not of the eighteenth century, and the idea of “the street” has a different meaning today. The interpretation of the street as a location of urban life is missing from the narrative in historic areas. The question must be, why? Why leave out an aspect of the city that was historically so important?

Reasons for the discrepancy in interpretation between streets and structures can be explained in several ways. The first to be considered is the development of the historic house tour and the preservation movement. Early movements in historic preservation were instigated by those who saw something important in a given structure, a moment in history that had to be preserved in a physical sense. The Mount Vernon Ladies Association provides a helpful example from the early preservation movement. The Ladies saw in Mount Vernon an association with an important man, a piece of his life that was significant to understanding him as a historical figure and an emblem of patriotism for future generations. As preservation and historic structure work has

progressed over time at Mount Vernon and other locations, emphasis has continued to be placed on those locations that have a significant connection to a person, event, or historical theme. Every historic designation must include a statement of significance, a kind of proof of why this structure or landscape is worth the retention, appreciation, and funding. Historic home tours have developed in the same way—as a proof of why it is important that this structure remains and why the residents were important on some level. The streets have no such champions.

No public historian, grassroots movement, or non-profit is currently arguing for the retention of the street unless it is constructed of a historic material like herringbone brick or cobblestone. This is understandable. Streets are forever, streets are necessary to daily life no matter their usage. Nobody needs to protect the streets or prove they are important because society cannot do without them and continues to use them. The streets are eternal. So they lack interpretation, they lack documentation, and they lack significance to the historical profession. This despite ample historical evidence that these areas were significant to life in the eighteenth century in a different way than we envision today. The placement of a street as a connection between one place and another is telling and gives a greater overall understanding of how life was constructed. Why were streets cut in certain directions? Because there was a need to connect one neighborhood with the downtown in a direct way, or there needed to be a way for carts to reach merchants from the wharves. Streets tell the story of transportation, of access and egress; stories told in a way that historians are not fully exploring and public historians are failing to interpret.

Creating a sense of the everyday eighteenth century on city streets is not a simple task. The most significant obstacle to the creation of this type of narrative is the issue of control. Narratives can be developed effectively in urban residences because they have defined boundaries. Visitors are constrained by walls or fences and their movement is dictated by a docent or velvet ropes. Here the narrative can be crafted based on specific movement and experiences that are easily replicated on timed increments in groups of manageable size. A city does not offer this type of control. Sites such as Colonial Williamsburg, interested in the development of a more urban experience, create their own boundaries to define their historic area and the extent of their narrative. This is not realistic in a major metropolitan center because the streets are in constant use. In a city, groups of many sizes can enter or exit the area from any direction, making it difficult to dictate narrative order. In addition, structure tours are a relatively quiet experience. Guests are able to immerse themselves in the staging and focus on the message at hand. Streets are noisy with cars and people, making it more difficult to gain and hold guest attention. It is due to these challenges that the significance of the street has been minimized in interpretation, despite the fact that the streets existed as the lifeblood of communities in the eighteenth century. Interpreters must find a way to transcend these challenges to connect with the public and create the sense of an eighteenth-century community that functioned on a daily basis in order to bring guests into a greater understanding of the urban environment. While some attempts have been made in this direction, only those within living history applications, such as Colonial Williamsburg, have been successful.

Interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg are working to introduce guests to the street as a social space. Visitors to Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia are invited by the ticket agent to select one of a number of interpretive experiences and tours as outlined in the site's brochure. One of these experiences is to take part in eighteenth-century life on the streets of the city by both witnessing and participating in public demonstrations and oration. The program begins in the streets in the morning and continues in the afternoon, involving guests until early evening in the events of 1776 Williamsburg. This is a wonderful urban experience of everyday life as it plays out in city squares and common areas, integrating these public spaces into the narrative as easily as it does the surrounding structures. These activities are the subject of conversation among costumed men and women in the streets and buildings throughout the day, available for guests to overhear and interact with. While the program intersects with many of the buildings on the streets, the main focus of the program is the common areas allowing guests to experience what this exciting moment in America history must have felt like to residents of the period. It is an immersive experience that takes full advantage of the extensive work that has been done to remove the visible elements of modern life from this eighteenth-century world. Even those guests not taking part in the street program still take part in a more lively history than exists in other heritage tourism locations. The sense of the effusive character of everyday history permeates every aspect of guest interaction with Williamsburg.

Interpreters in every part of the Williamsburg historic area work to make sure that guests understand connections between structures, and how each had a part in colonial

life. Visitors to the jail are encouraged to visit the courts where the story continues. Those who speak to the wig dresser in a shop will be told how the governor's wig was made, his status, and encouraged to visit his home. Questions are asked that encourage guests to not only engage in the narrative, but contribute to it. Where did your wig come from? What trades were you apprenticed at? What colony do you reside in? The gentle prodding encourages guests to let go of their modern ideas and to participate in history as an active rather than passive observer.⁸⁷ Even more importantly, for the length of their visit to Colonial Williamsburg guests not only witness everyday life, they participate in it. It changes historical perspective and is a powerful interpretive program.

The contrast between the experience of guests at Colonial Williamsburg and those in Philadelphia or Charleston is striking. How is it that Williamsburg, a reconstructed eighteenth-century town, is able to get it right? Why is it that locations where the visitor walks on the actual streets involved in the story and visits the actual buildings that figured into these events, do not? It is disappointing that a visit to Independence Hall is less engaging than one to the Virginia House of Burgesses. One aspect of the discussion that must be acknowledged is that Williamsburg is a living history museum with a well-endowed foundation and relatively high ticket prices, as compared to other sites, to support it. Cities and non-profits must rely on existing budgets, grants, thrifty tourists and neighborhoods that are still occupied and used by residents. Again, part of the answer is control. Colonial Williamsburg has created a very controlled guest experience on a large scale. Williamsburg has purged itself of all distractions in the core of the historic area.

⁸⁷ This program was in effect in the Spring 2008 season.

Cars are rare, modern noise is minimal, even the power lines have been buried. Modern cities cannot fully ignore that their residents still need to work and interact with a modern environment. Nevertheless, this condition should not be insurmountable or contradictory to a consistent and satisfying historical experience for guests or a challenging and effusive narrative.

One key aspect to the discrepancy between actual cities and living history museums like Williamsburg is sources. Williamsburg uses a variety of historical sources to assist in its representations. This has been the case since the very beginning of the museum in the 1930s. Historic sources were necessary to facilitate the reconstruction of the buildings and to create a narrative that fit in with the existing and new structures. This reliance and insistence upon historical sources as the basis for work done has created a very important difference. Over time, insistence upon the use of primary historical and secondary scholarly sources has helped Williamsburg to cope with problems in the original narrative. These alterations, predominately the lack of African-Americans and women in the interpretation, have had mixed results. The types of sources used varied from building plans and street maps to letters and diaries from both the New World and the Old. By using these sources as the primary focus for creating a meaningful experience for guests, the park has been able to create an eighteenth-century reproduction that helps create a sense of the historical everyday. One of the most visible locations of the success of this process is on the streets. The historic area has recreated a vibrant street culture that includes people of all classes and ethnicities. This is an achievement that is founded on and maintained by the sources.

Cities such as Charleston and Philadelphia have ample sources available to provide public historians with an understanding of what street culture was like and its importance to the inhabitants. Heretofore interpretations, though, have not made good use of these sources to develop an overarching interpretive narrative. The focus instead has been and remains on individual structures, one that also frequently fails to make meaningful connections between them. This is not to suggest that Charleston and Philadelphia should develop living history as their mode of interpretation as at Williamsburg. However, with some creativity and commitment among a number of agencies that administer historic resources in these cities—from private groups to national organizations—an experience that allows the guest to access a more consistent and challenging narrative could be developed. The experience that currently exists is disjointed and sometimes overly simplistic, and bearing little relation to sources.

The historic portions of the City of Philadelphia provide an example of how the narrative of a city could shift to create a more integrative and textured experience for the heritage tourist. Philadelphia has a significant number of eighteenth-century structures restored and maintained within easy walking distance of each other. These sites are maintained by organizations such as the Colonial Dames, the National Trust, the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks, and the National Park Service, and all are included in the information provided at the city's heritage tourism center. The center is a useful resource to get tourists started on their experience through encouraging exploration of the city. A number of methods are available for those who want to tour the city, including GPS programs with information provided for a number of locations, maps

and brochures, interpretive signs, and walking or bus tours. These resources provide guests with the opportunity to visit what they want on their own schedule. While this is an approach to suit many tastes, what is lost is interpretive cohesion in some cases. This is most true when considering interpretation of the city as a whole in the period presented, the late eighteenth century.

The resources available to guests at the Independence Visitor's Center—the GPS, the cell phone tours, the twelve-page pamphlet of activities—all of these provide the same type of narrative, focused on structures, heavy on patriotism, and light in its coverage of context and sense of everyday life in the eighteenth century. These available materials are concerned with reinforcement of the traditional meta-narrative rather than alteration of public memory in formation of a new, inclusive meta-narrative. This condition could be easily altered while still retaining the main infrastructure of the tourism system. It is obvious through an exploration of the visitor's center that the many historical organizations in the area have come together to create this location. The visitor's center directs guests to heritage locations all over the city from residences such as the Physic House to churches and even businesses such as City Tavern. It should not be difficult to imagine these organizations coming together to create a cohesive narrative that could include all the locations, or many of them, in a historically meaningful, possibly lucrative way. Achievement of this goal of cohesion and increased context requires creativity, source conscious work, and an acknowledgement that visitors will be engaged enough to appreciate the effort. This type of cohesion among historic resources

in Philadelphia has been attempted with limited success in the Historic Philadelphia GPS Ranger Tour, available at the Independence Visitor's Center.

The GPS Ranger Tour of Philadelphia, available for single-day rental at the visitor's center, creates an experience that moves guests through many of the highlights of the heritage area. The tour is narrated by a costumed Benjamin Franklin, who uses images of primary sources, videos, and historic photographs to assist in interpretation. The GPS tour is an innovative and successful approach in that it overcomes some of the challenges of urban interpretation, especially guest attention and controlled boundaries. The GPS creates a recommended route for guests to take with numbered stops for narration. Guests can take the route in any order they like, but the fact that the experiences are numbered encourages guests to move through in order. The narration plays at each site, no matter the order of experience. In addition to guiding guests to each site, once the guest has arrived, the GPS begins a narration that can be replayed or paused. This allows for guests in noisier areas to wait until they can give it their full attention. In addition to the narration, guests are encouraged to go on the tours of as many sites as they wish. The GPS is small, has good battery life, and it can be easily stowed while guests experience the interiors of structures. Finally, guests are quizzed by the unit at periodic points along the route, encouraging fact retention. The GPS is meant to be a street accessory. The narration works to create some connection between structures and gives a limited sense of the everyday. The interpretation explains the use of each building, who lived or worked there, and usually connects it to at least one other historic feature of the city. Guests are frequently encouraged to stop and look around them at the

cityscape, to understand the proximity of structures and how the physical city worked in an everyday manner. While the GPS stops short of addressing the significance of the urban landscape overall, particularly the importance of the streets to urban culture, it is a step forward. It presents guests with a different way to experience the historic area of the city and includes a narrative that is more inclusive than that obtained at individual sites. While the GPS tour is not making great strides in the alteration of public memory, it has the potential to become an important tool in city interpretation.

Possibly the best example of narrative cohesion in Philadelphia combining the context of the street with sources and structures is the National Historic Landmark Elfreth's Alley. This location is a functioning street with continuing residents that have maintained the character of this alley by preserving it themselves. Residents take great pride in this accomplishment and have left one of the alley units open as an interpretive center with tours and a small museum shop to support the preservation efforts. Elfreth's Alley is a few blocks away from the rest of the historic core of the city. Guests must walk through streets that do not convey a sense of time, only a slight sense of urban decay, as they make their way. However, once they turn the corner to the alley, they are transported to a different time (See Figure 4.2). The alley is remarkably intact thanks to the work of its diligent residents. This location has been preserved through the Elfreth's Alley Association, a grassroots organization engaging in extensive property research and using a variety of sources to preserve the heritage of their beloved neighborhood. The preservation of the alley has been achieved through careful examination of records dating back to William Penn. The history of each small dwelling is told through census,

taxation, and building records. This careful work has made it possible for the Elfreth's Alley Association to create a well-rounded experience that is truly consistent with the history of the location and gives a surprising glance at the everyday life of more ordinary Philadelphians of the eighteenth century.

Elfreth's Alley was originally a cartway, developed to connect the wharves with the city. Over time, small densely-constructed dwellings were developed on very small plots of land. The association encourages individual exploration by guests and consistently exemplifies their master narrative as "Our Nation's Oldest Residential Street." The Association does not interpret the residences separately from the street, and frequently explains the importance of the proximity and connection to the wharves in determining residence and use. They explain the occupations of residents and the status of patrons to allow visitors to immerse themselves in the history that surrounds them. The brochure published by the association, "Inside These Doors," explains their sources of information, and even acknowledges that some research has yet to be completed. This openness and honesty assists guests in understanding the historian's process and, in some cases, the process of creating public history. Inside the museum house, docents explain what changes have occurred over time in architecture and in furnishing the dwelling. The alley also frequently employs craftsmen like chairmakers or weavers to show the types of trades that were part of alley livelihood in the eighteenth century. Even the piazzas of the dwellings are available for exploration. Visitors are never left to feel ashamed of the fact that they are wandering through someone's patio, instead they are encouraged by interpretive signs that tell them what these areas were used for in the past. As members of

the Association and residents on the street, docents are excited to explain neighborhood preservation, the work that has been done, how they found their sources, and what they want people to learn. This approach is refreshing not just in its attention to detail and sources, but also in its overall encouragement of visitors to become engaged in the history of everyday life and the preservation of their own neighborhoods.⁸⁸ But this system does have some limits.

While Elfreth's Alley provides a well-rounded experience, it does not connect well to the rest of the city. It is more than a mile from the Liberty Bell, and the narrative that currently exists at the core of the heritage area does not make it a necessary stop. Even rangers at the visitor's center identify it as a fringe attraction. This is because of the lack of cohesion in the area. The solution to the cohesion problem and the integration of the streets into the narrative must begin with the visitor's map (See Figure 4.1). The map is the official experience guide for visitors. They can pick and choose where they want to go and how they want to get there, creating an experience that is as long or short as they desire, including only their specific interests. The guest experience in Philadelphia is not presented as, nor is it conceived of by visitors, as a total experience. It presents individual experiences of history conveniently located near each other. The map's color coding identifies the portions of the city that are within Independence National Historic Park, but even the National Historic Park lacks a cohesive narrative that is easily available and readily obvious to guests. In order to create a narrative that more closely reflects

⁸⁸ Elfreth's Alley Association, *Inside These Doors: A Guidebook of the historic Houses of Elfreth's Alley a National Historic Landmark* (Philadelphia: Elfreth's Alley Association, 2007).

eighteenth-century life, a better approach would be to label portions of the city in specific ways and color code them based on Billy G. Smith's idea of concentric circles of habitation and use in the city.⁸⁹ The existing map readily shows the zones that might be identified. Four different areas of interpretation become quickly obvious once the map is considered with an eye to representing eighteenth-century usage and normal life.

The first area of interpretation is the City Center. This area contains many of the buildings that currently compose the Independence National Visitor's Center and some surrounding buildings. Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell are representative of the political core of the area, while the Exchange, The Bourse, Carpenter's Hall, and the American Philosophical Society are representative of the other business and intellectual pursuits of the male inhabitants of the city. This was the intellectual, economic, and political center of the city in the eighteenth century. This is the area where independence was declared, Congress met, the first capitol was located, and many of the upper and middling residents of the city made their employments. There was a constant movement of residents in and out of this area for various pursuits, and the rest of the city developed around it. Business resided in these streets as easily as in the structures, and the hotbed of this business, around a few central intersections, had meaning.

Secondly, the Residential Zone which surrounded the City Center. The southern side of the city center is where the largest concentration of intact residences currently exist. Residences in this area—the Todd House, the Powel House, the Physick House, the Bishop White House, and Society Hill—represented the residences of the upper class and

⁸⁹ Smith, 11.

some upper middling class residents. These were the people most in need of access to the City Center, and those most engaged in city society. They would frequently be engaged in the use of the streets for visiting, taking evening strolls, and attending to the daily needs of household management. On a given day in the eighteenth century, you might see any number of women in carriages or in groups on foot. Men would be traveling to their homes or on visits to conduct business. And both black and white servants and tradesmen would be bustling along the streets to complete the day's more basic labor. The occupations of these residents, some medical practitioners, some merchants, some politicians, help to explain the types of structures present, the need for street connections to the city center, and the presence of gardens for the residents to transact social business.

The third zone of interpretation would be the Periphery Zone, including lower class residences and the location of artisan and trade shops for the city's residents. These intact locations remain more on the northeast side of the city. In addition to the wharves, locations such as the Betsy Ross House and Elfrith's Alley present an idea of how those engaged in trades might live and where that business was transacted. The proximity to the wharves is significant, and the distance from the city center is instructive, too. These were less fashionable areas and so they did not include the high architectural style residential structures of the second zone. They represented a location that was for visiting as related to household management and business affairs, but certainly not for visiting socially. The compact nature of the structures, the population density, the width of the streets, and the lack of more genteel elements like gardens give the streets a different feel than those in the better residential areas. These streets were full of all sorts of people.

Upper and lower classes were mixing here out of necessity. The area was likely noisy, probably smelly, and most likely the structures were not well constructed overall. The occupations here would be varied and would likely require the use of the streets for carts, horses, and access to both the wharves for work or materials, and the city center for employment, deliveries, or services.

Finally, the outer boundaries of the historic area also are in need of interpretation, even though the extant structures are relatively scant. Areas such as the Waterfront and the Jewish Cemetery provide evidence that some areas were outside of the fashionable and were reserved for those that were less socially acceptable. Wharf workers, ship crews, immigrants, free blacks, and Jews might live on the outskirts of society, putting them on the outskirts of the city. The physical location of these groups, literally as far removed physically from fashionable or acceptable society as their social standing, is emblematic of the manner in which the city constructed separation of residents to reinforce the social hierarchy.

The employment of these types of zones allows for an interpretation of everyday life in the eighteenth century in a way that is meaningful and integrative. It acknowledges all aspects of the city's population and the interactions between them. It is reflective of the sources and integrates the extant elements of the historic city in a narrative that is vibrant, alive, and memorable. A similar approach could be taken in the audio, walking, and cell phone tours of the city. Interpretation of city resources can never begin at a doorstep. In order to develop accurate context interpreters must remain mindful of the

fluid nature of the city and the interactions within its communities. The most accurate context of any aspect of the city must include the contexts of the street and city culture.

An example of the need for expansion of context can be found at Dr. Physick's Residence, interpreted by the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks. The current interpretation of this site focuses on Physick's daughters, his innovations in surgery, and the many furnishings of the home; overall it is a nineteenth-century interpretation of an eighteenth-century home. Physick and his family inhabited the residence beginning in 1815, but had many patients whose names are familiar to guests—John Adams and Dolley Madison, to name two. Despite its placement slightly outside of the period, the Physick House provides an excellent example of missed interpretation interpretive opportunities to integrate the residence into a larger context. Physick house exists independently of the street or any context of the outdoors. Guests to Dr. Physick's house could, from the earliest moments of the tour, be encouraged to consider the meaning of the façade of this structure and its placement on the street. What did it mean to those in dire need of the doctor's services to reach this door? How many anxious moments were spent waiting for someone to answer on the doorstep? How many servants ran down Fourth Street late in the night, assured by masters and mistresses that every moment was critical? The view from the parlor windows overlooks the street—what did this mean to the Physick daughters? How many hours were spent peering from these windows to see who was about? Or waiting for a favored suitor to arrive? Eighteenth-century walls were not sound proof—what did the street sound like? Was there a sense of foreboding every time a horse or carriage came thundering down the cobbles? Evidence

of a terrible accident, a death, or illness? Guests are more engaged by these questions, this evidence of real life, than the standard “point and shoot” material culture interpretation that this residence’s interpretation emphasizes. The society of the family is also easily imagined by referring to other families in the neighborhood and the type of activities and society participated in. Interpreters must alter structure interpretation to acknowledge the landscape, be it a plantation or a city townhouse, because environment has meaning. Interpretation must acknowledge that life existed not just within the walls, but outside of them, too. The idea that a walk down the street could be just as meaningful as a visitor in the parlor is one likely completely alien to guests. Indeed, such unexpected ideas can create new thoughts and guest experiences. Unfortunately, connection between structures is similarly uninterpreted despite how simple it would be to invite guests to stroll down the street to another residence for a visit, just as the Physick daughters or Dr. Physick himself might have done out of social necessity, politeness, or to make a physician’s call. Creating these types of experiences, which make connections to everyday life, challenges guests to alter their public memory. But to develop such larger contexts is challenging work that requires an overall reorganization of the standard historic structure experience. Nonetheless, this change is necessary to developing a better heritage tourism experience.

Charleston, South Carolina is another urban center that is both rich in historic resources and missed opportunities. Historic Charleston represents both an interpretive challenge and a unique opportunity for interpreters. The city’s history of disaster and invasion has created a unique cityscape with an eclectic mix of finely preserved

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century architecture with some modern infill. This mix gives visitors a great opportunity to see and understand the evolution of a city. Charleston is beloved for many reasons, its Southern charm, beautiful gardens, fine weather, and perhaps most importantly, the historic character of its streets. This city is perhaps one of the best urban locations for retention of the distinct feel of early American streets. Many have not been widened, some are still cobbled, and they do represent an often maddening tangled web for tourists to navigate by car. For this reason the preferred way to view historic Charleston is on foot or by carriage tours, two modes of conveyance that provide an excellent opportunity for the guest to experience eighteenth-century life in the urban center.

The carriage tour is a Charleston staple. There is a certain mystique and Southern romance associated with touring the historic city in such a fashion. It allows guests to go back in time, experience the city from the same perspective as some historic residents did. This type of tour provides an opportunity to convey a real sense of everyday life in this urban center, but it is frequently not taken advantage of. To be fair, the object of the tour companies is not an authentic experience or even one that is historically accurate or intellectually challenging for patrons. They are not associated with the city or the Historic Charleston Foundation, the non-profit that has had such a significant hand in the preservation of the city and its character. As private enterprises, it would be admittedly difficult to impose a more accurate or intriguing narrative on them. The tour companies need to make money to feed the horses and pay the guides, so they focus instead on stories of local color and Southern charm, often overlooking some of the more

challenging aspects of Charleston society, slavery, racism, disease, and disaster. The carriage tour also functions much like ineffective walking tours of many historic cities, moving from structure to structure heedless of connective elements such as the streets. The structures are the stars of the tours, as the carriage moves patrons easily from house to market to cemetery at just the right pace to convey a quick blurb about the architecture and the city's more famous residents. The street is only a place for the horse to trod, insignificant to the narrative. At spaces between structures, it becomes easier to convey local statistics than to discuss the real pressing issues of Charleston in the eighteenth or nineteenth-century.

The carriage tour is disappointing because it could be so much more, and while some patrons will always prefer stories of the defense of the Battery or how Rainbow Row got so colorful, there is a significant and growing portion of the population who want better history in their heritage tourism experience. This is a history that a carriage tour could explore far better than what a walking tour could provide. In Charleston, the carriage becomes the ultimate venue for a discussion of race and class, particularly the visible and invisible elements of a highly stratified and racialized society. Patrons could be encouraged to consider their perspective, elevated above the street level. What things are missed below on the street level? Refuse, stench, horse droppings. Who is missed? This is an especially useful question; servants, shopkeepers, slaves, the lower classes who have only walking the street as an option for travel and who depend upon the streets for their livelihood. The relationship to structures is also significant. The Charleston townhouse was developed with ventilation and ocean breezes in mind, but carriages were

also important considerations with the full-width portico designed to welcome guests from the carriage level. Visitors could be encouraged to consider who traveled in these carriages and what it meant to be in them. Conversely, they could also consider what it meant for slaves and others to be looking up at them, or passed by them in the street. Were the carriages symbols of aspiration or wealth? Objects of revulsion? The opportunity to engage with guests on the topic of everyday life is myriad.

Walking tours of the city also provide the opportunity to experience many aspects of Charleston society in the eighteenth century. There are a number of extant residences from the period. Even visitors who do not engage in an official walking tour of the city can get a good idea of the character of the narrow streets and the benefits of ocean breezes just by wandering the neighborhoods. The cityscape of Charleston allows visitors to consider an important aspect of the Southern colonial city—the experience of slavery. South Carolina was the wealthiest of colonies due in large part to the port of Charleston and its participation in cash crop agriculture in the low country in the form of rice and indigo. The city of Charleston is at once an expression of that wealth and the demands of gentility and the dependence on slave labor for the production of that wealth. The port of Charleston for some slaves was their final destination after a horrifying experience on the Middle Passage. A disorienting experience from the moment of capture, the lives of African slaves and the way they experienced the urban landscape would be a new way for tourists to consider the city. Slavery is not invisible in Charleston's interpretation. It is discussed, but not always in a meaningful way, and not in a highly visible manner. The Old Slave Mart with its museum and several other locations in the city and on the

plantations seek to encourage visitors to explore the slave culture that developed in the area and understand the status of slaves in the society. The College of Charleston is actively involved in the creation of a more meaningful experience in the city and along the Ashley River to assist in a better interpretation of the slave experience. However, beyond markets and rusty shackles, the city needs to encourage visitors to see through the eyes of the newly arrived Atlantic slaves, rather than the country-born slaves of the nineteenth-century. Interpretation of slavery is an important component of understanding the everyday in Charleston.

In addition to more effective carriage and walking tours and a more complete interpretation of the issues of race and slavery in the city, Charleston could take advantage of several downtown cemeteries that would add significantly to urban interpretation. Americans are fascinated by death, dying, and ritual. The eighteenth-century cemetery was an important component of the urban landscape in Charleston, as it was in many other eighteenth-century cities. The cemetery allows visitors to connect with a very real aspect of everyday life in the eighteenth-century—the very real fear of death. Charleston was a city in the eighteenth century blessed with wealth but cursed with disaster. Many current visitors are unaware that the hurricanes, fires, and earthquakes—events posing a frightening threat today—also existed in the eighteenth century, but in an even more unpredictable and terrifying fashion. In addition to these natural disasters, residents of the city and the surrounding countryside were plagued by diseases that periodically ravaged the populace. These factors together led to a large number of deaths and a great need for cemeteries. As interpretive elements, they open up the urban

environment in a new way allowing for the discussion of demographic shifts, urban renewal, and disaster history. A vision of the everyday that is unexpected and disquieting.

South Carolinians were troubled by disease, natural disaster, and invasion, which posed significant disruption to the community and the continuity of everyday life.

Residents of South Carolina had to face a number of diseases with few sure remedies.

The best remedy in some cases seemed to be moving away from the disease, leading to more visiting among relations in town and country than may have occurred in other colonies.

In addition to disease, particularly in the urban environment, fire was a real concern.

Many female writers commented on the fires plaguing the city and the amount of familiar structures that had disappeared from the landscape. Compounding the

concerns of fire and disease, and in some cases causing them, was the fear of Atlantic

hurricanes. Irrespective of its size or strength, in a colonial environment a hurricane was a highly destructive force bringing death indiscriminately. In addition to environmental

disasters, the threat of invasion was ever present. In the low country some limited threat

from Indians existed, but the larger threat toward the end of the eighteenth century was

from invading armies. The Revolution brought British and American forces into the city and countryside, bringing death and destruction with them for families and their homes.

Finally, the intimate connection between the wealthy residents of South Carolina and

their counterparts in the Atlantic world; in England, the Caribbean, or other coastal

colonies led to the constant possibility of death at sea.

The central location of the cemeteries, the streets that surround them on every side, their excellent preservation, and the large number of tombstones and monuments

that remain from the period make the cemeteries of Charleston a prominent part of the cityscape that is not fully exploited. Walking tours may point out the most prominent members of society laid to rest in this place, or some of the names on the tombstones, but the discussion of death and disaster in eighteenth-century Charleston is largely absent. The cemetery held a place of honor, to remind residents not only of their departed loved ones, but also the place of death in this seemingly opulent frivolous society. The cemetery also provides a location to open a discussion of the race and class of those buried, offering a stark contrast to the African-American burial ground farther downriver at Drayton Hall Plantation. Graves at Drayton Hall are unmarked, only portions of sunken earth indicate where slaves were laid to rest among the trees. It is unplanned, just a cleared patch of brush without formal fences, monuments, mausoleums, or maintenance in large part until only recently. Death was an everyday reality in the eighteenth-century, a fact that is not frequently interpreted for guests, but would not soon be forgotten.

* * * *

The interpretation of gardens further challenges perceptions of America's historic urban locations. Gardens are typically present in historic areas but are rarely interpreted. In the case of Colonial Williamsburg, beautiful eighteenth-century gardens exist on the streets and next to some of the reconstructed buildings (See Figure 4.3). Some are used as entryways and others are used as examples of what eighteenth-century gardens looked like beautifully structured in the English style and carefully maintained. While the gardens are visually impressive without interpretation, the purpose of the garden in the eighteenth-century urban landscape is not evident to guests. Colonial Williamsburg offers

two different types of garden tours. The first discusses the archaeological evidence used to develop the garden and the second discusses methods used to cultivate eighteenth-century plant varieties. Not only is a tour on the significance of the garden to eighteenth-century residents is absent, and the best garden tours of the heritage area are reserved for registered guests of Williamsburg resort hotels only, making them inaccessible to the general public. Because gardens are such a typical feature at historic sites they do not always attract notice for their historical meaning. No one questions the meaning behind the existence of a garden at a heritage site, docents or guests. It just is, because there is a sense that it should be. This lack of interpretation is problematic.

The garden was a significant aspect of life in the American colonies in both urban and rural locations. Men and women in urban locations appreciated a good garden, whether a municipal garden or a private version. Many homes had gardens, some more protected than others from public view at the rear or sides of homes. For some, specific gardens held particular meaning, special memories or beautiful vistas, and they reported visiting them multiple times. Some took trips out of town in carriages just for the pleasure of taking a walk in a favored garden, such as Bush Hill outside of Philadelphia. Others described visits to new gardens while traveling in locations throughout the colonies as a special treat and an exercise in comparing the gardening styles within the colonies. No matter their form or location, gardens provided ladies and gentlemen with an alternative to the street or the parlor for conversation, while still providing a sense of privacy. Both men and women spent extensive time in gardens, and for some, particularly the very young or the very old, the garden may have been the only space available outside to take

some air. For those who were ill, the garden might be the first foray out of doors in a great while. During good weather, dining was also undertaken in the garden under awnings. Eighteenth-century Americans, both male and female, took great pride in their gardens, planting many different flowers and shrubs, trying new varieties, and reporting to each other on their successes and failures. A number of writers from the period commented on fruit orchards and a variety of berries as pleasant additions to summer strolls and amusements in the city.⁹⁰ The garden was a significant aspect of eighteenth-century life, and should retain this prominence in modern interpretation.

The first challenge of gardens in the historic urban environment is location. While some gardens follow a historical precedent for their locations, others are created and used to fill awkward or empty spaces in order to add cohesion and beautify the area. Gardens were a prominent feature in the eighteenth-century urban environment. There were private gardens attached to residences and public gardens in many areas. Some gardens were kitchen gardens providing a supplement to meals with vegetables, fruit, and herbs or plants like lavender suitable for drying before entering into household application. Still others existed for amusement and contemplation. No matter their usage the English garden was significant for colonists and remained so throughout the eighteenth century. While the historic location of a garden is not necessarily paramount, it is essential to understand that the placement and size of gardens changed over time. As long as a garden is interpreted appropriately, a representative garden created today can be as significant as

⁹⁰ Examples of the garden culture of Philadelphia can be found in: Warder, HSP, volumes 2 and 3, and Sharples, HSP, Journal entry, January 31, 1792.

an authentic one, especially as the ability to access and cultivate authentic plant material is rare.⁹¹ The question of location is significant only when a garden is placed in an area where it never would have been in the eighteenth-century. Gardens were a significant feature of the streetscape, so it is important in historic areas that develop representative gardens (See Figures 4.1, 4.3, and 4.4) that they be placed in a historically consistent location and interpreted appropriately.

The two present-day urban locations with the most significant garden challenges are Philadelphia and Charleston. Both of these cities were known for their excellent gardens in the eighteenth century, but both currently present largely uninterpreted gardens for modern guests. A representative eighteenth-century garden is found on Walnut Street in Historic Philadelphia between the Todd House and the Bishop White House (See Figure 4.4). While this was not a garden location historically, this garden has been established in an eighteenth-century style for visitors. An onsite interpretive sign states, “The re-created garden you see here incorporates many features of formal gardens in the 1700s. Neat pathways, geometric flowerbeds, small orchards, and gazebos are all characteristic of early Philadelphia gardens.”⁹² This is good information, instructing guests that this garden is a re-creation, and also pointing out the characteristic features of the garden itself. The missing element of this interpretive sign is context. Since the

⁹¹ While docents at the John Adams residence and John Quincy Adams Presidential Library in Quincy, Massachusetts, claim the longest continuously growing hedge in America, existing in the same garden since the eighteenth century, this type of claim is rare. However, heirloom plant examples may be found at a number of sites in Charleston, South Carolina, along the Ashley River at Middleton Place Plantation, and at Williamsburg, Virginia, among others. The use of heirloom plants is not necessary, the organization, placement, and interpretation of the garden are the most significant features to the presentation.

⁹² Independence National Historical Park, “Eighteenth-Century Garden,” interpretive sign, 2009.

garden takes up a third of the north side of the block in this historic area, it seems amiss that the garden is not interpreted fully with respect to the significance of both the design and social meaning. The garden in the colonial period had immense significance, and should be integrated into an overall discussion of the streetscape and urban life. Urban residents appreciated a good garden; it provided a place of comfort and solace, a place for social gathering and quiet reflection. The lack of interpretation of this garden is perhaps because it is not attached to a residence, and as has already been explored, it does not fit into the more defined boundaries of historical narrative that structures represent. However, gardens that are attached to interpreted residences often suffer the same fate.⁹³

The Powel House on Philadelphia's Third Street is administered by the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks and suffers from an attempt to over-interpret some elements of the residence while minimizing the significance of others. The Society administers the house with a small staff and gives guests a handout for a partially self-guided experience. The handout describes the features of the interior and its preservation, room by room. While there is an obvious use of primary document sources in the preparation of the self-guided handout, they are not put to good use. In particular need of revision is the handling of the garden at the Powel House. Guests are admitted to the garden toward the end of the tour and are largely left to develop their own

⁹³ For further discussion of eighteenth-century gardens see: William Nathaniel Banks, *Gardens of the South* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985); Joan Parry Dutton, *The Flower World of Williamsburg* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1962); Audrey Noel Hume, *Archaeology and the Colonial Gardener* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1974); Ann Leighton, *American Gardens in the Eighteenth Century: 'For Use or For Delight'* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976); Ann Leighton, *Early American Gardens: 'For Meate or Medicine'* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1970); Dorothy S. Manks, ed. *America's Garden Heritage: Explorers, Plantsmen and Gardens of Yesterday* (Brooklyn: The Garden, 1968); Christopher Thacker, *The History of Gardens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); and Tom Turner, *Garden History: Philosophy and Design 2000BC-2000AD* (London: Spon Press, 2005).

interpretation. The garden itself is not well maintained. While the brochure refers to the garden plan as a “colonial revival interpretation,” it does not live up to the standard of a garden of the colonial or colonial revival period. The garden is not consistently maintained in the off season, the foliage is sometimes poor, miscellaneous ephemera that does not belong in the garden is littered about, and the walkways are broken in places. No eighteenth-century garden in this part of Philadelphia would ever have looked so shabby, as it would have reflected badly on the residents and offended their sensibilities. The neglect of the Powel garden both physically and intellectually is difficult to understand in a practical sense. The description of the Powel garden in the handout discusses that the Powel property used to be more extensive but was eventually built over with a large factory. The handout describes the outbuildings that might have been on the property, and then after describing the garden as a revival style rather than an eighteenth-century reproduction claims “Despite the changes, it is still one of the best urban gardens in Philadelphia, and today is often rented out for parties and weddings. Enjoy!” The handout also encourages guests to enjoy a rest in the garden rather than sitting on the historic furniture.⁹⁴ The guest handout does not provide an interpretation addressing the historical significance of the garden or its function in an everyday capacity for the residents of Powel House.

In addition to a gardener and possibly a bricklayer, what the Powel garden needs is attention to detail in its narrative. The garden of the Powel house had meaning to the Powel family. It did not function only to take up space. Almost nothing in the eighteenth

⁹⁴ Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks, *The Powel House of the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks* (Philadelphia: Rocinante Press, 2006).

century existed without a use, a fact that visitors find fascinating. Currently, the interpretation in the Powel handout lacks discussion of why the garden existed, who used it, the significance of the plan, and why it was important to the Powel family. But guests should be encouraged to consider the fact that nothing was ever built over the garden space. The residence was constructed in 1765, the garden space has been there for over two hundred years, and that fact alone has great significance. Rather than encouraging guests to merely sit in the garden in a modern capacity, it would be better for interpreters to encourage guests to walk out into the garden, to stop and consider it as an eighteenth-century resident or guest of the Powel House might. Guests should be encouraged to listen to the sounds, look at the surroundings, and consider the visible and invisible elements of the garden to the outside world and from the windows of the residence itself. The everyday life of eighteenth-century residents is evident and tangible in this space. Guests can consider what else might happen in this garden because of its proximity to the outdoor kitchen. What servants might meet and gossip here? What business might be transacted in this garden? Courtship? Gossip among women and girls? There are so many interpretive possibilities to explore in these spaces that are not seized. And improving interpretation in the garden does not have to appear only on the guest handout. Sample eighteenth-century style conversations could play on hidden speakers in the garden. Guests who stop to listen could hear any number of examples of the everyday function of the garden space. While the present handout points out that the garden is a revival, a superior interpretation would address why this type of structured garden was revived in the first place. Given the correct alterations to narrative, interpretation, and maintenance,

the Powel garden could indeed be one of the best urban gardens in Philadelphia. In addition to improving the residence tour, the Powel garden could mesh well with the Third Street garden and the larger city gardens to give an overall impression of the importance of the garden to Philadelphia society. The interpretation of these urban gardens is significant to developing a concept of everyday life. The significance of the garden to eighteenth-century Americans is not covered within the meta-narrative and not typically considered in the public memory. Addition of this significant landscape feature brings new dimensions to the public memory of the exchange of ideas and everyday function of life in the eighteenth century.

Charleston has also struggled to develop significant garden interpretation. The Garden Club of Charleston hosts yearly garden tours to support their efforts in the preservation of gardens at the city's historic sites. During these tours the club celebrates Charleston's horticultural heritage and docents point out the flora and fauna that were first cultivated in Charleston gardens before their appearance in other colonies. Unfortunately the focus of these tours, which are only given in the spring, is to make the point that gardens have existed in Charleston since the eighteenth century. What is missing here is the deeper context, the immense importance of the garden to city dwellers and the place that the garden held in urban social life. Historical sources exist from men and women who were involved in experimenting with many horticultural varieties in their gardens and from women traveling through the colonies that testify to the significance of the garden in eighteenth-century life. Many commented extensively on gardens they visited in cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston. The use of

these sources is significant to public historians looking for a way to connect with the public on a subject that may seem at first glance mundane for visitors. Many modern Americans have gardens as did eighteenth-century Americans, a fact allows connections to be made with guests. Once these connections are made, interpreters can add to the larger narrative of everyday life in the eighteenth century through the use of the garden. This was a cherished location for many eighteenth-century residents according to their own writings and should be interpreted in this way for guests.

The interpretation of a garden can be a gateway discussion for heritage tourists encouraging them to consider other ideas and issues that do not have an easy transition in other locations. In this outdoor setting, while many are mesmerized by the beauty or the planning of a garden, others are bored by what they see as just another collection of flowers. It is an opportunity to discuss a variety of topics connected to everyday life in the eighteenth-century urban environment. Guests should be encouraged to consider the historical prevalence of both public and private gardens. Gardens can also introduce urban demographics with a discussion of who lived in the city and maintained these garden spaces. Many experimental varieties of plants were brought to the colonies from the Caribbean or other locations, which opens up a line of inquiry that can go in many directions, including America's place as part of an Atlantic world, cultural exchange at many levels, and even a discussion of the pastimes of men and women in the eighteenth century and the interest many had in botany—indeed, if one must inject a “great man” into the garden, even the founders had botanical interests. Discussions of gardens are typically found on plantations, but many people lived in urban Charleston and many

visitors came from throughout the colonies and from Europe, and the garden was a significant element of this cityscape and held meaning for these visitors and residents. Yet, this dynamic must be given context in order to bring visitors into a deeper historical understanding.

Both the garden and the streetscape can be used to impress upon visitors the great importance of civility, gentility, and appearances in the British Empire. A garden, well-regulated streets, regular structures, an ordered population, these were emblems in the eighteenth century of real civilization being created in an area that was considered throughout the seventeenth century as largely wilderness dominated by the savageness considered characteristic of its inhabitants both Indian and English. The replication of English society in the colonies was significant to inhabitants on a variety of levels. It made America a more respectable place to live and encouraged immigration and investment in the British economy through its colonial ventures. The issue of respectability was a concern for many colonists in the American urban centers, not just respect at court, but politically too. America needed to be a legitimate location of civilization and culture, recognizable to Englishmen as a place with a population worthy of respect and consideration. This was extremely important to the wealthy colonists of South Carolina and Virginia, who desired a place among the landed gentry and the attendant benefits of this status. While many Americans that visit the nation's heritage sites are filled with pride in their nation and expect this pride to be reinforced at battlefields and residences, they may be challenged by a different characterization of America as the backwater of a great empire struggling to assert itself as significant and

worthy of representation. This type of challenge to public memory has great meaning for heritage tourists because it alters their perspective and causes them to rethink their previous historical understanding. The struggle to be understood as a legitimate and valuable location within a larger empire, in particular, is key to understanding the struggles of the 1770s. Primary and secondary education has created a meta-narrative that makes the conflicts of the 1770s mainly about taxation, but this conflict can also be understood as a matter of respect and a struggle for self-worth. Any time a heritage tourist can be challenged by a narrative different than the usual, or left with a historical question that they find both puzzling and intriguing, public historians have done their job. They have encouraged thought and inquiry that will in time lead to alteration in the public memory. Contextualizing gardens, then, as a touchstone of civility and evidence of colonial aspirations of respectability and representation, has the opportunity to revision public memory in just such a way.

The revision of urban interpretation, including the streets, gardens, and larger cityscapes is essential to both the revision of public memory and the development of a sense of the historical everyday. Americans in the eighteenth century lived in urban centers on a greater scale than the previous century, a trend that continued into the mid-twentieth century. Historic cities are popular heritage destinations because of their concentration of sources and the freedom of movement they present to visitors. It is because of the number of sources, and their organization in a manner similar to both historic and modern ways of life, that cities are such a valuable educational resource. Americans of the eighteenth century did not live in a vacuum; they were members of a

vibrant community that depended on communication and exchange. This is a portion of the historical narrative that is not typically explored at heritage sites. Its presentation as a prominent context of urban interpretation allows modern Americans the ability to understand the everyday life of the past. Through this understanding they will develop an altered perspective with which to assess and reform popular memory. Alteration in urban interpretation is a significant step on this path. In addition, larger scale urban interpretation encourages heritage organizations within municipalities to work together to create meaningful narratives and to work to discuss and interpret history in a way that incorporates more than archival materials. This new focus of interpretation recognizes the place of less traditional historical sources in the form of structures, building materials, and urban planning, just as easily as a letter or diary. To encourage guests in these new perspectives public historians must improve the urban narrative. Creating an integrative narrative, one that encourages incorporation of all aspects of the built environment without dependence upon individual structures as independent entities, will create an experience of urban history with greater impact for both heritage tourists and local residents.



Figure 4.1 Map of Historic Downtown Philadelphia⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Historic Philadelphia, "Independence Gazette Summer 2009," Historic Philadelphia, <http://www.historicphiladelphia.com> (accessed June 1, 2009). This map of Historic Philadelphia is provided as part of the Independence Gazette, a guide for visitors allowing them to tailor their own visit to the area by providing information, program times, and advertisements.



Figure 4.2 Elfrith's Alley, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Figure 4.3 Garden at Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Virginia



Figure 4.4 Garden on Walnut Street in historic area, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Chapter 5: “Black History Can Be Found Outside”

At Hampton Plantation State Historic Site in McClellanville, South Carolina, guests drive through three miles of scrub and pines in the Francis Marion National Forest to visit a rice plantation that once belonged to Harriot Pinckney Horry, daughter of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, one of the founding mothers of South Carolina. Visitors drive to a small clearing, then walk down a path to the residence, which is surrounded on three sides by thickets. The road frontage of the residence is cleared but the river façade faces more scrub stretching down to Wambaw Creek and the remains of eighteenth-century rice fields. The tour of the residence begins on the creek-side portico where guests gather to wait for the docent. While waiting, guests have little ability to pay attention to the stunning eighteenth-century architecture or the silent beauty of the marsh and thickets because they are busy attending to the wildlife. Swarms of mosquitoes fill the air on the grounds of Hampton Plantation. Visitors are irritated. While some try to bear the experience with a positive attitude, many others are inspired to complain to the docent when they appear. The docent tells the guests that they should think of the many slaves that lived and worked at Hampton Plantation every day, sun up to sun down, in similar conditions. Indeed, white South Carolinians engaged in plantation agriculture did not live on the plantation in all seasons because of disease and mosquitoes, conditions that slaves were not fully immune to but could not escape. The visitors are now silent, the swatting of mosquitoes the only sound audible among them. In three minutes, even before the tour of the residence has begun, the docent has introduced the visitors to the harsher conditions of eighteenth-century life and the reality of slavery. This experience at

Hampton Plantation is not typical among eighteenth-century heritage sites. Docents at Hampton actively seek the creation of a unified narrative in this moment, one that considers all residents of the plantation concurrently, offering a real glimpse of everyday life to make a connection with guests. Unfortunately, the majority of eighteenth-century sites do not seek this unity in conveying the historical narrative for guests, a decision that cripples their ability to alter public memory.

Slavery and its interpretation at eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historic sites is one of the most significant conversations in the field of public history today. It is not difficult to understand why. Americans are interested in the topic of slavery. Some are disturbed by it and many want to look away, but most heritage tourists understand that some acknowledgement of slavery in American history is essential. American history has not always been pretty, acceptable, or comfortable. In response to guest interest in slavery, heritage sites have conditioned visitors over time to seek the history of slavery and the African-American narrative separately from the dominant white narrative. It is presented as an ancillary or special topic, not the primary concern of the site or the interpreters, but presented for those who are interested. This development of artificial separation within the history of a heritage site gives guests the false impression that African-American history is a lesser history or a separate history from the history that is being presented in the main. It encourages guests to consider history not as a single narrative that evinces progress through the interactions of many and complicated historical actors as presented at Hampton Plantation, but as multiple narratives. One, the white narrative, is presented as the narrative of American progress. The secondary

narratives are presented as existing concurrently, but without impact or significance to larger American themes. This artificial view of American history denies the agency of millions of historical actors and encourages the idea that exclusionary history is acceptable. The remedy to this problem of the meta-narrative must be a proactive approach among public historians in developing a unified narrative and a modification of the type and tone of slavery interpretations available to guests.

The root of the narrative problem can be understood in terms of the debate over multiculturalism, begun as early as the 1970s, but emblemized more recently by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. in *Disuniting of America*.⁹⁶ Schlesinger for decades participated in a larger debate about the construction of the American meta-narrative. In the view of Schlesinger, the idea of the “Great American Melting Pot” was the most significant to historical understanding. Any erosion to this idea by the inclusion of specific studies of the many cultures that composed or contributed to American culture posed a danger to the meta-narrative and to patriotism overall. On the other side of the debate, historians such as Lawrence W. Levine argued that the place of modern history was to challenge the old historiography and alter the meta-narrative by studying the cultures and influences that were brought to America by others. Individual understanding of historical influences, such as the African cultural perspective, could only strengthen understanding.⁹⁷ By examining individual cultural contributions of America’s many component cultures, a more comprehensive and meaningful narrative could be constructed. This debate, which

⁹⁶ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992).

⁹⁷ Lawrence W. Levine, “Letters to the Editor,” *Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (June 1994): 367-368.

has lasted over 30 years, has created a separation within American history into increasingly specific subfields and the development of microhistory studies to flesh out the history of those under-represented by the traditional meta-narrative. Interest in many new narratives representing groups such as women, African-Americans, immigrants, and Native Americans developed and split American history into a series of specific studies. While this deconstruction produced excellent work and greater understanding, it also fractured the meta-narrative, a break that must now be healed. It is not practical for public historians to participate in the perpetuation of this type of separatist narrative. At a historic site there is neither space nor time to develop multiple concurrent narratives successfully, and even if one could, the public does not benefit from such attempts. In order to truly alter public memory in a positive way it is essential to develop a new meta-narrative that benefits from the individual studies of formerly under-represented groups and creates a whole that acknowledges the agency of all groups in the progression of American history.

Currently, many historic sites attempt to engage in a fractured narrative. They understand the concept of multiculturalism, but not the purpose of the approach. They present a one-dimensional narrative that serves as the primary interpretive focus of the site. Then interpreters create multiple smaller-scale, intensive tours or presentations to both acknowledge and further develop other narratives on the site. These smaller narratives are presented separately and do not interact with the primary interpretation. The purpose of the exercise should be to use the knowledge developed in the individual research to deepen the overall interpretation of the site. Instead, a fractured narrative has

been created, one that has a negative impact on heritage tourists. This tendency to create multiple narratives that are ineffective is most clearly demonstrated in the case of slavery.

The presentation of slavery at historic sites of the eighteenth century is problematic regardless of region. While it would be easy to pigeonhole this essential issue as merely southern in nature, it is national in scope. Heritage sites throughout the country struggle with the inclusion of slaves and free blacks in their narratives. The acknowledgement of slaves and free blacks at heritage sites opens the door to new avenues of interpretation, but it creates new venues for struggle and discomfort with guests and docents. Sites in the South wrestle with the common fact of slavery and how to integrate it into the narrative in a sensitive way that does not vilify the white historical actors. In the North, sites largely ignore the slave and free black narrative because guests do not expect its presence. There is also a tendency in both regions to consider slavery as a nineteenth-century issue. In addition to these regional issues of interpretation, difficulties also occur in both urban and rural interpretations. Just as all sites have their own unique challenges based on sources and locations, so too will the interpretation of slavery at these sites vary. The modern interpretation problem is rooted in the new social history which began to emerge in public history during the 1970s. Response to this movement created new interpretations at heritage sites beyond the dominant white male narrative to include those historical actors that had been previously marginalized. Lower classes, indentured servants, immigrants, women, and African Americans were added to show diversity and compliance with the latest scholarly historical and political trends. However, these new historical actors were integrated into alternate narratives, not the

dominant site narrative. The development of new interpretation was deemed appropriate at its time, as evidenced by the positive reception by guests and the availability of grant funding to support these projects. However, the time for this type of fractured interpretation has passed. It is time for interpretation and narrative to undergo another change to respond to more modern historical ideas and the demands of a more accurate and sometimes difficult historical experience. The idea that a token mention of these groups, particularly African-Americans, is appropriate has long dominated many sites. Interpreters must now understand, no matter their location, that American history represents a shared experience encompassing many cultures, African and European dominant among them. The success of the colonial period, revolution, and early republic were dependent upon the experience of white and non-white sectors of society working simultaneously. Even though the work of each in the new nation was very different politically, economically, and socially, the outcome was the same; the creation of a larger whole that was the product of all individual contributions. To bring this message to the public through interpretation is to bring a truer understanding and develop a history in popular memory that is more accurate and more compelling.⁹⁸

African-American representation at historic sites exists typically as an independent force. Most sites have adopted a “special topics” approach to the discussion of slaves, slavery, and the presence of Africans and African Americans. Slave history is separated from the primary residence and primary narrative in both urban and rural

⁹⁸ In addition to this outcome, several historians, including James Oliver Horton, have opined that the development of slavery as a significant topic in public history, and its larger insertion into popular memory, will lead Americans to a larger and more significant discussion of race in America. See James Oliver Horton, “Presenting Slavery: The Perils of Telling America’s Racial Story,” *The Public Historian*, 21, no. 4 (Autumn, 1999): 19 – 38.

historic residence locations. This slave history resides outdoors or in outbuildings, in small exhibits, sometimes in audio presentations. Frequently cities and historic sites offer special tours for those interested in the African–American narrative. These tours present a different side of the dominant narrative described or show guests a part of the plantation or city that was not on the main or popular tour. While the existence of the tour and the content is frequently good, with docents typically very knowledgeable, these tours are optional and present a separate history. The history presented mimics some of the issues within the dominant narrative, but does not interact with it effectively. But these secondary tours are one sided and do not represent all parts of the story. Selected historical actors are described, without acknowledgement in large part of the interaction between the two narratives. With the separation of tours, the history presented is never fully contextualized for the guest—leaving both tours incomplete and ineffective. To combat the disjunction between these tours some sites have added African-American voices to ease the transition, but this approach has not been effective.

At many historic locations, an African–American representative has been selected or created to be an ambassador for guests, to ease the transition to African–American history. In Williamsburg it is Bristol the footman; at Mount Vernon it is Martha Washington’s maid; at Hampton Plantation, the voice of a sharecropper can be heard; at Monticello, James Hemmings is the dominant voice; at Middleton Place, Eliza the sharecropper; and on the Freedom Trail it is Phyllis Wheatly or Crispus Attucks. Those selected personalities introduce the idea of secondary narratives in ways that are simple and comfortable for guests to understand, without creating a troubling

confrontation with an uncomfortable past. In essence, these sites have created a segregated history and called it appropriate.

Heritage tourists do not find fault with this segregated interpretation because if they desired to hear about black history they have the venue, and if it makes them uncomfortable, they can avoid it. Interpreters, although separately, have included “both sides of the story” and therefore feel justified in their treatment. However, considering the narrative as two sides of one story is flawed in its conception. All that truly exists at any site is a single story with a single set of historical actors that interact on a consistent basis. It is representation based on this idea that should begin a new era of historical interpretation at heritage sites.

Numerous examples exist of problematic interpretation of slavery and the African-American experience. Some have already been discussed earlier in this study, such as the case of Shirley Plantation. But other examples of poor slave interpretation abound, including Colonial Williamsburg, Middleton Place Plantation, and urban interpretations in Boston and Philadelphia. Colonial Williamsburg as a living history site presents to guests a day in eighteenth-century life. Middleton Place Plantation presents low country plantation living in a more traditional historic house museum format. Boston and Philadelphia include city walking tours, and are a larger experience with less restrictive boundaries than the others. Each shares in common an attempt to present a history that takes into account all aspects of the narrative in a disjointed presentation. All fail in different ways, but the root of failure is the same, an artificial division of the central narrative.

At Colonial Williamsburg numerous attempts over many years to develop a narrative that incorporates the African–American voice have been made. The greatest stride in this direction was the acquisition and interpretation of nearby Carter’s Grove where a slave quarter allowed guests to visit and learn.⁹⁹ The recent sale of Carter’s Grove has left the site with a less effective slave presence and guest experience. Much has been made of the slave interpretation at this site by historians and the popular press. As a living history museum, costumed interpreters walk the streets and visit the businesses among the guests, giving a feel of everyday life in the eighteenth-century. However, costumed African – American interpreters are few. Those that exist are not always interpreting African-American life in the city in the eighteenth century. It is never quite clear if these costumed interpreters are interpreting slaves or free blacks, or what their role in the city is. The role of these costumed interpreters is more evident within residences such as the Peyton Randolph House. Craft demonstrations are similarly unclear about the role of slaves or freedmen within their task. The message presented to guests is that while Colonial Williamsburg was a location of racial diversity, the status attached to race in the period is less significant to understanding.

The interpretation at the Peyton Randolph House has been altered to take into account the slave experience, perhaps to offset the loss of the Carter’s Grove slave quarter. Guests are guided through the residence by African-American docents who

⁹⁹ The slave quarter, when constructed was considered a model of the new social history and a step forward for Colonial Williamsburg. The struggles of Colonial Williamsburg to come to terms with the new social history is covered in Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). Significantly, this work was published prior to the sale of Carter’s Grove and includes very little on overall interpretation of African-American narratives at the site.

explain the work that has to be done to care for a great home and family. Guests are similarly guided into the yard where slave dwellings and outbuildings are described. While this is a compelling experience, a separate narrative has been woven here. There is little discussion of the interaction between white and black residents at this location. Similarly, all other residences discuss only the white narrative with little exception. It is not readily evident that slaves resided or worked at other residences or businesses along the main streets. If guests were to skip the Peyton Randolph house in the course of their visit, the experience would be all but invisible. Guests who are interested in the slave experience at Williamsburg have two options beyond the Peyton Randolph House to expand their interaction with the subject. They can purchase the *Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg*, which attempts to repent for the sins of interpretation – something many historic site guides do. Interested visitors can also take a separate tour of the historic area entitled “In Their Own Words” to better understand the slave experience.

Guests who select the “In Their Own Words” tour are confronted with a very different history than the one they anticipated. The African–American docent who gave one such tour in fall of 2009 made clear to all guests that the tour was not going to be easy or pleasant.¹⁰⁰ They would be hearing things that would be painful, horrible, and shocking. He encouraged them to understand that real history is not simple or pleasant. This docent also encouraged guests to understand both the historic area and the guest

¹⁰⁰ “In Their Own Words” (walking tour, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, VA, September 19, 2009). This tour was presented in association with the 30th Anniversary of African-American interpretation in 2009 at Colonial Williamsburg. At present there are no daily tours providing an interpretation of slavery in the historic area. The removal of the tour after the anniversary year is further evidence of the struggle at Colonial Williamsburg to develop meaningful and lasting history that represents an integrative narrative.

experience as a fantastic construction. He argued that the historic area had been constructed as a fantasy for white guests to enjoy. These guests were walking into homes that the majority of them would never have gained access to had they lived in the eighteenth century, partaking in entertainments that would have been out of their reach, and were being encouraged to see only what was pleasantly presented to them. They were partaking in historical fantasy, not a true representation of everyday life. Since that was what most guests in the historic area wanted and paid for, that was what they obtained. The tour used primary source documents, laminated and given to guests for perusal, and actual locations within the historic area to construct a very different narrative than the popular one presented in the historic area. The docent discussed the Middle Passage, life on plantations, slave codes, the hypocrisy of the revolutionary and religious fervor of the eighteenth century, and the experiences of several real slave families of Williamsburg. The most telling moment of the tour was a stop at the stocks in front of the courthouse.

At the stocks the docent paused and explained to his group that many tourists took pictures of these stocks, let their children play on them, took goofy tourist pictures, all without understanding the stocks' true meaning. These stocks, he explained, were locations of pain and suffering. He showed where shackles could be attached for slaves to be lashed for criminal offenses. He explained the emotional meaning of the stocks for the former residents of Williamsburg and the disrespect paid them by modern tourists. At the end of the tour the docent fielded questions. When asked about the presence of slaves and the slave narrative at Williamsburg he opined that the narrative was not given the attention that it had been in the past. The loss of Carter's Grove, in particular, had

removed a large portion of the slave interpretation that had existed at the site in the form of the reconstructed slave quarter. He also argued that if visitors did not demand a more accurate narrative, it would never improve, because guests see only what they want to see. The implication being that until slave interpretation and the African-American narrative were considered commercially viable, they would not command interpretive attention. Case in point, as of spring 2010, the “In Their Own Words” tour is no longer part of the daily program at Colonial Williamsburg. Guests who seek further context for the African-American experience in Williamsburg can now turn only to the official guide.

The *Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg*, too, presents a different perspective than that obtained in the heritage area. The introduction to the work encourages guests to understand Williamsburg in 1774 as a city where “...residents were part of an extraordinarily dynamic community. It was a community of patriots and Tories, of slaveholders and slaves, of dreamers and skeptics.”¹⁰¹ From the very beginning the reader of the *Official Guide* is encouraged to see Williamsburg as a single community where the culture and understanding of the many create a unified experience. In special sections of the text guests are introduced to slavery in Williamsburg. Visitors are given the history of slavery in Virginia and then encouraged to understand the interactions between the black and white elements of Williamsburg society.

Although Africans could not alter formal institutions, individual slaves were able to shape personal relationships with whites. They also participated in a local, increasingly cash-based trading economy. Blacks

¹⁰¹ Michael Olmert, Suzanne E. Coffman, and Paul Aaron, *Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg, Third Edition*. (Williamsburg, Virginia: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2007), 1.

and whites influenced one another's speech and culture as well. Rather than being a process that blacks or whites consciously pursued, cultural sharing was the inevitable result of their interaction in all areas of their lives.¹⁰²

This section on slavery gives the impression that this is the interpretation of slavery to be expected in the heritage area; a story of interaction, cultural sharing, and unified understanding. However, this is rarely the impression given outside of the guide on the grounds. Besides this discussion of African and Africa-American elements of society, the guide addresses the residents of Williamsburg as slave owners concerned over the security of their property. This is evident in the two enslaved characters presented in the guide, Bristol the footman and Eve the ladies maid, both of whom are described as indispensable to their respective masters, but always aware of their enslaved condition. This is most evident in the case of Eve who throughout her life escaped, was captured, and had her children sold away from her. But there is the opportunity to make a greater point here in the cases of both Eve and Bristol; these two people were held as property and that the revolutionary message sounded different to them. While this fact is alluded to in the guide text and sometimes touched upon in the heritage area in special presentations, it is not a significant part of the main narrative. Currently, guests are encouraged to consider the language of freedom and its ring across the many public and private buildings of the heritage area. However, they should also be considering the laws restricting freedom that were a prominent conversation in these same buildings. The reluctance to acknowledge both of these in a prominent manner restricts the ability of the

¹⁰² Ibid, 61.

heritage area to portray accurate history. In addition, it has a negative impact on the formation of popular memory about the revolution and its rhetoric.

Based on the period of interpretation at Colonial Williamsburg and the variety of primary sources available, there are a number of stories of slavery which remain unacceptably unacknowledged. Perhaps the most exciting addition for guests would be the story of Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment. Currently, the Governor's Palace presents within the first moments of the narrative a description of Lord Dunmore's flight from Williamsburg. Docents explain that Dunmore was concerned for the safety of his young family and abandoned the city. However, there is little discussion of why this was necessary other than the safety of the Governor's family. Guests who participate in the African-American history tour learn of the recruiting of slaves as an unpopular action but there are few guests that take advantage of the tour. There are so many moments of learning and understanding available just in the use of this one historical event.

The interpretation of Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment provides an opportunity to understand the position of slaves as private property in Virginia. It also identifies slavery as one of the hypocrisies of revolutionary rhetoric. In addition it can assist in explaining why loyalists were not more prevalent in Virginia. Finally, the outrage and fear caused by this incident explain fully why Dunmore would flee the city. However, Williamsburg as it currently exists is unable to either represent this moment to its fullest significance or make it understandable to guests in its historical context given its dearth of African-American interpretation. If it were possible within the current historic area the impact could be considerable. For example, visitors appearing for the

last tour of the day at the Peyton Randolph House with slaves could be met by a few female house slaves and a nervous mistress. The reason being that all the other slaves, who typically give the tour, went to join Lord Dunmore and obtain their freedom. This is just one possible moment, where white and black history can come together in this place, and create a meaningful experience that both gives a sense of everyday life and an idea of how the Revolution disrupted that life. Colonial Williamsburg is not the only location that struggles to make these connections.

The reluctance to take dramatic steps at Colonial Williamsburg to force understanding and confrontation of difficult history is likely due to the uproar against the 1994 slave auction staged at the heritage site. This one-time slave auction is discussed by many historians in their analysis of the reluctance of Americans white and black to face a frank discussion of race.¹⁰³ However, the Williamsburg slave auction taught valuable lessons about the power of public history. The slave auction presented white interpreters auctioning off slaves represented by black interpreters. Audience members were captivated by the demonstrations. However, the slave auction was protested by many, including members of the NAACP. The auction was blasted for what some saw as its attempt to entertain through the suffering of slaves and creating a forum where whites paid to watch the pain of blacks. The negative response to the slave auction is evidence that slavery can be an emotional topic that has the power to captivate and inform. Nonetheless, no one that attended will ever forget it. Interpreters and visitors alike

¹⁰³ The Williamsburg slave auction is covered in a variety of sources and has been considered by several historians. See James Oliver Horton, "Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: The New Press, 2006), 35 – 56.

learned something very important about the nature of slavery and the hypocrisy at the root of the revolutionary spirit. The outcry caused by the auction caused a softening of the slave narrative at Williamsburg. Slavery is presented in a gentler way presently, one that is less likely to cause uproar. This is unfortunate. The lessons of the slave auction are such that one should be staged every day or every week. The more Americans are forced to deal with the truth of their history, the more they can understand and learn from it. The purpose of public history is historical education. Presenting a partial history is contrary to that goal.

The problem of the slave auction occurred because Williamsburg and other heritage sites had not set the stage for the interpretation. Interpretation of slavery at Colonial Williamsburg previous to the auction had been present, but it had also been relatively pleasant. Guests were learning specific things about slavery but not being encouraged to come to a full understanding of the slave experience. They saw slaves toiling in the fields, they saw African American interpreters in the slave quarter telling stories and singing spirituals, and they heard about daily labor. However, these were just the briefest and simplest of introductions to a complicated topic. To begin in this manner and then have a slave auction was too much, too fast, for an audience previously encouraged to interact with a select and simplistic narrative. Guests had not been confronted with the less pleasant realities of slavery. Instead they were only led in a comfortable direction. They learned that slavery existed in Williamsburg, that slaves did work, and that they were not free. These were basic concepts and ideas that visitors could easily make comfortable and acceptable in their own minds. Guests were not instructed

on where slaves came from, their legal status, or their designation as property that constituted material wealth in Virginia society. As such, they were unlikely to learn about punishment, family separations, rebellions, or slave codes. However, this is the type of learning that must precede a more dramatic interpretation. Shock treatment will not produce the desired result, as the reaction at Williamsburg shows.

Colonial Williamsburg has worked more effectively to present the truth about white inhabitants in and around the colonial capitol. The guest experience at the entrance to the heritage area, New Hope Plantation, is a farmstead worked by poor whites. Poor whites are presented as the true majority in the area, not the wealthy that live in the town. This country plantation has interpreters who are working the plantation in an eighteenth-century manner, using the tools and techniques of the period, a true representation of everyday life for the majority of eighteenth-century Virginians. They even raise and slaughter their own hogs. The narrative at New Hope Plantation seeks to lead guests through a more challenging history to lead them into greater understanding. The story of poor whites in Virginia is perhaps not as difficult to present as an interpretation of slavery, but New Hope Plantation serves as evidence that difficult history can have a natural place within traditional narratives.

Guests to Colonial Williamsburg can see at New Hope Plantation that the standard of living between this location and the town is dramatically different, that survival is often difficult and backbreaking work, and it puts the townscape of the heritage area into a different perspective. Guests proceeding to the town from New Hope will see things in a different way as informed by this experience. This is amplified by the

interpreters in the town area that refer to New Hope plantation to widen the perspective. There are elements missing at New Hope Plantation similar to those missing in the interpretation of slavery within the larger heritage area. The interpreters at this site describe agricultural work and the work of survival. They do not discuss the connection of poor whites to others in the area or their political status, yet in the period of interpretation these rural folk would be disenfranchised. They would not have a voice or role in the government. Some of them might have begun their American experience as indentured servants or even convicts, but any type of disenfranchisement is not discussed with guests. The costumed interpreters at New Hope do not engage in a conversation about freedom even though freedom is the greater theme of the townscape. There is a real attempt made at New Hope Plantation to lead all guests into a greater understanding of historical reality when it comes to the poorer inhabitants of Williamsburg, however, only the poor white inhabitants. The realities of race and freedom in the countryside are largely ignored.

The tour of the residence at Middleton Place Plantation, one of the extant Ashley River Plantations of South Carolina open to the public, similarly does not create a realistic interpretation of the countryside for guests. While it is a beautiful location with well – meaning docents, the narrative of the residence tour is dated and disorganized. Throughout the residence guests in dark rooms view artifacts that belonged to people they barely understand while listening to a narrative that lacks appropriate context. The furnishings of the residence are sometimes oddly organized and the residence itself seems caught between a desire to be a historic house tour and a traditional museum. Docents are

similarly torn between telling the story of a family and encouraging guests to look at artifacts. In fall of 2009, during a tour of the residence, a guest asked the docent about the slave presence in the residence. The docent's response was that the main house was the location of the white history of the site. Black history could be found outside.

Middleton Place Plantation presents a historic house museum, plantation yard, and gardens. Visitors to the site who are seeking African-American history need to look closely and think critically to learn the whole story. It is clear from the words of one Middleton Place docent that black history at the site exists outside only. There are several artifacts of slavery that are on display within the main house, a slave tag and shackles, but these are from excavation, and are presented in that manner. They are not fully presented as living representations of the Middleton family as longstanding slaveholders. Like the artifacts in most display cases in the residence the slave tags and shackles have exhibit labels that are rarely discussed and guests are not always given the time or space to read them. In the exhibits closer to the river, in those buildings essential for the production of rice, the African and Africa-American slave aspect of plantation labor is clear and evident. A sample rice paddy and the remaining buildings of rice infrastructure tell the story of the hard work involved in rice production. If guests want to know what slaves did and how they lived at Middleton Place, they need to go to Eliza's House, the former residence of sharecroppers on the plantation grounds.

In the plantation yard, interpretation of slavery is minimal. The yard is an area used primarily to display eighteenth-century work such as weaving, milling, and candle making. In this area it is only the task on exhibit. Discussion of who performed the labor

is not readily evident. At Eliza's House, at the edge of the property, guests are given the opportunity to explore a small exhibit on slave life at the plantation. Here the Middle Passage, the purchase and sale of slaves, the slaves owned by the Middletons, and what happened after slavery are all on long exhibit signs with a prohibitive amount of text. An interpretive "African American Focus Tour" originating from Eliza's House is given a few times a day. However, the times, when compared to the schedule of other available activities at the site, are inconvenient. On one visit in fall of 2009 this tour was given twice, at 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., while residence tours, stableyard interpretation, and carriage tours were given as frequently as every hour in some cases. Even tours of the garden were given six times throughout the day. This infrequency of African-American interpretation evidences the little interest given to the African-American presence at the site, despite the centrality of this presence to Middleton Place's form and function. The plantation, run by a private foundation, has won acclaim for its gardens and grounds; they are the primary economic force for the site generating the highest proportion of tourism revenues. Apparently, those slaves who created the butterfly lakes, terracing, and the formal gardens are of lesser importance.

While it may seem that the only interpretive issue of Middleton Place is, like Colonial Williamsburg, an artificial separation of narrative and perspective, the issue is actually deeper and far more troubling. The Middleton Place interpreters seem reluctant to acknowledge the full link between the Middletons and their position as slaveholders. Every guest to the site receives as their ticket a map of the site which includes brief interpretations of some of the major locations. One map element, an insertion (or

afterthought) not physically attached to the map, is about Eliza's House. Eliza was the final occupant of the residence, an African American born in 1891 who remained living in the house at the plantation even through its transition to a tourist attraction in 1975. Eliza's residence is the location of African-American history for the site and Eliza represents the African-American Middleton experience, however, Eliza was not a slave. The interpretation in the map about the residence shows a reluctance to discuss slavery and its position at Middleton Place.

The printed materials available on slavery at Middleton Place are a telling exhibit on the significance of the slave narrative at the site and the attempts to both display and obscure it at the same time. For instance, the first sentence of the Eliza's house description in the guest map pamphlet is quite confusing: "Once occupied by former Middleton slaves, or Freedmen, Eliza's House (c. 1870) originally stood where the Middleton Place Restaurant is now."¹⁰⁴ There are a number of interesting aspects to this first sentence. First, the implication that slave and freedman are synonymous is problematic. This is certainly not true and begins by giving a false impression of the condition of Middleton slaves. Interpreted differently, the first sentence of the description of Eliza's House encourages guests to consider the Freedmen that lived at the site, denying all history before 1870. Second, the fact of the original location is glossed over significantly. The residence used to be where the "restaurant is now." The restaurant is currently adjacent to the plantation house meaning that the occupants of Eliza's house were kept close at hand to the white inhabitants of the main residence. Eliza's House was

¹⁰⁴ "Eliza's House," (Charleston, South Carolina: Middleton Place Foundation)

later moved as far away from the plantation residence as possible. The physical distance created between the residence and the Eliza's House is emblematic of the interpretation of this site – slavery has been moved as far away from the perceived dominant narrative as is feasible.

The interpretation of Eliza's House seeks to acknowledge the presence of slaves and their status on the plantation subtly while focusing instead on the lives of sharecroppers as free employees. The bulk of the discussion regarding Eliza's House as presented in the tour map focuses on the typical lives of Africa-American residents after the Civil War. While the chronology presented is blurry, it is clear that the intention is to give guests an impression that those African Americans living at the Middleton plantation lived as employees on this grand estate. The "historical background" given in the pamphlet begins in 1865, while the background for the Middleton Place dependency as stated in the pamphlet begins in approximately 1738. The pamphlet that addresses the plantation residence proudly proclaims the history of the Middletons at this location in the early 1700s. The interpretation of African and African-American residents begins almost one hundred and thirty years later. Interpreters are proud to acknowledge the presence of the Middletons on the Ashley River in the 1700s, but are reluctant to address the arrival of slaves.

Interpreters are similarly guarded when it comes to the status of slaves on the plantation. Middleton Place Plantation was burned in 1865 by Union soldiers. According to the description in "Eliza's House"

The owner, Williams Middleton, having done what he could to secure family possessions at Middleton Place, was away, trying to protect his

deceased father's Combahee River slaves and rice lands. Mrs. Middleton and their children sought refuge in the upstate.¹⁰⁵

According to *Beyond the Fields*, a guidebook to Middleton Place slavery available for purchase, Middleton Place in 1863 had 93 resident slaves. Combahee River had 495 in 1860.¹⁰⁶ However, in this passage, Williams is not described as securing his own slaves, only his “family possessions.” In contrast he is acknowledged as protecting his father’s slaves. In this passage the confirmed slave holder in the family is the deceased father. What property did Williams Middleton secure? What happened then to his slaves at Middleton Place? To discuss this would be to acknowledge that the Middletons owned slaves and that those slaves were their property. Not just their “employees” as is sometimes asserted, and not “freedmen” either. In addition, the family went upstate. Where were the slaves while the plantation was burning? Were they onsite? Had they been removed as well or liberated by Union soldiers? Are interpreters missing the opportunity to discuss plantation slaves watching as a symbol of their oppression is demolished by their liberators? These questions remain unanswered. After the destruction of the residence in 1865, the historical background begins to discuss the challenges that Freedmen faced after the war. The Middleton Freedmen are described in the pamphlet as

¹⁰⁵ “Eliza’s House,” Historical Background. (Charleston, South Carolina: Middleton Place Foundation)

¹⁰⁶ Barbara Doyle, Mary Edna Sullivan, and Tracey Todd, *Beyond the Fields: Slavery at Middleton Place*. (Charleston, South Carolina: Middleton Place Foundation, 2008), 40.

loyal employees who helped to restore Middleton Place as a dear home. It is acknowledged that not all the Freedmen remained, but numbers are not given.¹⁰⁷

Guests seeking historical understanding of slavery and the everyday experience of white and black residents on this eighteenth-century plantation will be challenged to understand the narrative and will be forced to piece it together from many sources. Visitors can get an introduction to slave labor in the rice buildings, from the map pamphlet they can learn about Freedmen on the plantation, but the fact that an exhibit exists is not mentioned. If guests make it to the exhibit at Eliza's House they will learn about slavery and see actual lists of slaves owned by the Middletons, a visual acknowledgement of the slaveholding history of the site. They may make it to the African-American focus tour, if they can manage the inconvenient times. What will be gained is a piecemeal narrative. African-Americans lived at this site, perhaps, is all that is certain. Their position and relation to the Middletons is not always clear. Indeed, the Middleton Place Foundation has made it perfectly easy for guests to ignore the true history of the site completely. The residence tour and garden tour, considered the essential components to any visit, are devoid of slavery as an interpretive element. Guests are provided with a pamphlet map that includes information on outbuildings which guests can easily substitute for reading exhibit text and the map rarely mention slavery. Eliza's House is about Freedmen, not slaves. The African-American focus tour is infrequent and

¹⁰⁷ "Eliza's House," Historical Background. (Charleston, South Carolina: Middleton Place Foundation)

easily missed. The message for visitors to Middleton Place is that slavery is not an important part of the dominant narrative. It is ancillary.

Guests who want to learn more about the history of slaves at the site can purchase a new book available in the gift shop called *Beyond the Fields: Slavery at Middleton Place*, which accompanies the exhibit in Eliza's House. This book is available packaged with the book on Middleton Place itself. The message sent to guests here is that there are in fact two separate narratives at this site that can not be considered together. They even warrant separate guide books. The implicit message is that each history must be considered separately to be understood effectively. They are never considered as one. While the new guide to Middleton slavery begins in the 1700s and provides excellent information, the focus is on everyday slave life. The Middletons are listed with every slave they owned and the prices paid for them. Even the plantations owned and the number of slaves per location is laid out for visitors to see. However, this information lacks interpretation, and is instead left for visitors to contextualize or not. Why does it matter? What is important here and what is not? These pages, which are not interpreted within the text, seem to exist only to present the basic facts of Middleton slavery, but not the implications. In addition, the guide to the site, *Middleton Place*, does not include a single slave: no mention of slavery, slaveholding, or slave labor exists within its pages. There can be no greater reinforcement of the separate histories and artificial narrative present at Middleton Place.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Middleton Place Foundation, *Middleton Place*, circa 1991. This guide, while including a final photograph of a 1991 Middleton Family Reunion, seems much older based on its photography and narrative, publication information is not listed.

Middleton Place must update and develop a narrative that looks to the eighteenth-century foundations of the plantation for its inspiration. It is essential that a narrative be created that respects both the white and black residents of the site and the work done to create this grand estate. South Carolina history is one replete with wealth and power, and this aspect the Middleton Place interpreters seem comfortable with, especially in a nineteenth-century context. But they have allowed the ruins of the main house to dictate the narrative and create a sense of loss at the site. Taking a more positive and inclusive direction would improve every element of the site and allow it to become a year round heritage tourism site that is known for honesty and integrity rather than just a must-see during the spring garden season.

Middleton Place interpreters should embrace its slave past and the development of the rice culture. The plantation can transcend its place as a symbol of old wealth. The development of rice in South Carolina changed everything in the region. Ownership of plantation slaves as part of rice cultivation allowed for a certain standard of living both in the countryside and in the city, the context for the wealth evident at Middleton Place. Rice changed all aspects of the colony economically, socially, and politically. Middleton Place is a great example of this eighteenth-century trend in South Carolina. The Middletons owned many plantations, this particular plantation held special meaning for their rice empire.

The rice empire was constructed with both slaves and rice planters working together to create something from nothing. The Middletons were part of a small rice hierarchy that was built upon the backs of slaves. These elites created the legal structure

that both defined American slavery and set the tone for Southern economic security. Planters borrowed rice cultivation from African slaves and these two cultures came together to make this incredible wealth and incredible oppression possible and permissible. A narrative that details how this contradiction occurred and the tension within the system of chattel slavery is sorely needed in this region. Middleton Place has the extant documents and infrastructure to do it well. It is neither a story that is easy to tell, nor a story that will seem popular or commercial, but ultimately heritage tourists want real history, rather than the artificial façade of exclusive white power that is currently in favor.

The fact that interpretation of slavery is problematic in the South should come as no surprise to those familiar with American history and historiography. However, more troubling is the resistance found in Northern urban centers to accurately presenting eighteenth-century history as regards African-American sectors of the population. The separation between the white narrative and black narrative that exists in Southern heritage sites is amplified in Northern heritage destinations because it is more easily allowed by guests who may be under the false impression that there were only whites in these areas in the eighteenth century. As such, visitors to Boston and Philadelphia do not necessarily expect to hear about slavery. Their view of slavery has been obscured by popular memory, which has instructed them that slavery existed on plantations in the South and nowhere else. They also remember that the Civil War – in very simple terms – was about slavery in the South and freedom in the North. They have not opened themselves to the contradictions of this history nor have they sought the truth. In fact, the Northern colonies

and urban centers in the eighteenth century were tremendous beneficiaries of African-American labor, enslaved and free. Nonetheless, African-American voices from the eighteenth-century North are limited at heritage sites. In popular memory only Crispus Attucks and Phyllis Wheatly come easily to mind (this despite disputes among historians as to the actual historical person of Crispus Attucks). Consequently, guests to the former Northern colonies do not expect to hear about slavery, African-Americans in society, or the influence of either on the dominant themes of American history. Because they are not looking for it, when they do not find it, they do not demand it, or even note its absence. They do not question the omission of African-American men and women within the struggle for freedom, the Revolution, or the Founding. The lack of overall demand has created an interpretation at historic sites in New England and the former Middle Colonies that lacks depth and is incomplete in scope and focus.

In port cities like Boston and Philadelphia there are a number of African-American stories that should be included in the overall discussion. These locations became powerful because they were tied to the Atlantic World economically, politically, and socially. This was made possible through the work of white merchants and their African-American slaves or employees. Black dock workers and sailors were common in the port landscape through the early nineteenth century in communities such as Philadelphia and Boston. Despite the Quaker worldview that slavery was wrong and sinful, a number of Quakers owned slaves in Philadelphia. Similarly, Boston merchants depended on slave labor in warehouses and on ships. Northern port cities also included a significant free black population that worked for wages alongside slaves and white

workers. These employees worked the docks, but also participated in creating the cities themselves. Construction, furnishing, and serving the city at large was a job done by whites and blacks alike. African Americans in the cities also participated in gatherings for elections, militia days, protests, and festivals like Pinkster alongside white city dwellers. African Americans were a constant and vibrant part of everyday city life. Unfortunately, in modern interpretation, they are not as visible or active.

Just as their Southern counterparts, Northern interpreters seek to pigeonhole black interpretation into a separate narrative. Some sites do offer “special” tours to guests who are interested. Even more pronounced than the poor interpretation at Southern plantations, guests may visit Boston or Philadelphia without ever interacting with any African-American historical actors. It is possible to explore neighborhoods, follow the Freedom Trail, and visit some of the most important historical maritime locations without ever hearing an African-American name or an acknowledgement of the work of African Americans in creating the narrative. Again, the narrative presented is white and exclusionary with an emphasis on the work of white hands to make America, rather than a joint endeavor that crosses color lines. Urban interpretation is lacking in this sector in both regions. While the best of African-American urban interpretation exists at sites in the South, Southern cities like Charleston still do not present a model effective enough to be followed. All urban interpretation must be reimagined to create a better understanding of historical city life, especially as regards African-American participation.

A good example of the loss of eighteenth-century slave and free black narratives in Northern urban centers is the city of Boston. Many of the historical attractions of

Boston are run through Boston National Historical Park by the National Park Service (NPS), an organization that is typically diligent in the presentation of multiple voices in all narratives. However, this is not as evident in Boston where the white narrative reigns supreme when considering the Revolution. At the visitor's center for Boston National Historical Park guests can obtain a map of the many historic trails in the city. Park rangers provide for those guests interested in African-American heritage a separate brochure entitled "Boston African American" covering the Boston African American National Historic site and encouraging exploration of the African American heritage of the city. The brochure has two sides. One details a separate tour of the "Black Heritage Trail" which tells a nineteenth-century story of African-Americans in the city. This tour is offered by NPS interpreters three times a day in the high season and once in the off season, the same frequency as the Freedom Trail tour. The period of interpretation of the tour is 1800 to 1900. The discussion begins in 1790 when, according to the federal census, "Massachusetts was the only state in the Union to record no slaves."¹⁰⁹ In essence this is a tour of African American life in antebellum Boston as Boston African American National Historic Site contains a rare collection of antebellum African-American urban structures. Given this, it is not an African-American counterpart to the Freedom Trail, indeed it not only covers a different time, it covers different neighborhoods. The other side of the "Boston African American" brochure traces "Black Boston Highlights: 1638 – 1909" on a single panel. Of the twenty-five highlights of black Boston, only five occurred before the nineteenth century. The two highlights of the seventeenth century are the

¹⁰⁹ "Black Heritage Trail," in "Boston African American," (Boston, Massachusetts, Boston African American National Historic Site, National Park Service, 2009)

arrival of slaves in Boston in 1638 and the 1641 Massachusetts legislation that legalized slavery in the colony. In 1770 Crispus Attucks is listed for his involvement in the Boston Massacre, and in 1783 the brochure proclaims the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts. By 1800, 1,100 free blacks lived in Boston. These are fairly scant details. Information about them is not provided in any other context. The brochure, through its other contents, gives the impression that almost all black history happened after 1783, but clearly, this is not the case.

Where has the rest of the history gone? Why are the African-American voices of the eighteenth century silent? It may be that the history of abolition was determined by interpreters to be the most significant story in Boston's African American history. However, the National Park Service has made it clear through the focus of their other Boston programs that tourists come to experience the eighteenth-century history of the city. This history as presented by the National Park Service is a white history. In a city that is presented to heritage tourists as the birthplace of freedom and liberty in America, the unfree are conspicuously missing. There is not an African-American component to the Freedom Trail itself. The tour of the Freedom Trail provided by the National Park Service only covers the history of the city of Boston and the work of the Massachusetts Bay Colony leading up to the Revolution. It is a white narrative that includes only white actors. The African-American revolutionary contribution is not included. This despite the participation of African-Americans in many of the revolutionary moments in Boston, including the Boston Tea Party, Boston Massacre, and eventually the siege on Breed's Hill. Their contribution is ignored and their omission is unquestioned by guests.

Information on the African American contribution to the Revolutionary story in Boston can be found buried in the National Park Service website.

The National Park Service, through their website, offers a number of special brochures on different topics of interest within Boston National Historical Park, one of which is a two-page document entitled “Salem Poor: ‘A Brave and Gallant Soldier’.”¹¹⁰ Salem Poor was a free black soldier who fought at Bunker Hill and who officers singled out among all other participants at the battle as worthy of accolades, even petitioning the legislature of Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1775 to recognize him. The brochure includes a brief discussion of Poor’s identity as a slave who had purchased his freedom, as well as a mention that many African Americans contributed to the war. The brochure argues that the Revolution may have had a different meaning for Salem Poor, and by implication, African Americans, too. The brochure ends, “We know little of his life, his death, his work, and his family. Why did this free black man choose to risk himself, fighting alongside men, some of whom owned slaves? And most important, why was this hero forgotten?”¹¹¹ Perhaps a better question to present is, why has the National Park Service forgotten Salem Poor or the contribution of others like him at the physical site of Boston National Historical Park? Why are these men remembered only on a website in a two page brochure that includes about one page of text? The Freedom Trail tour does not include Salem Poor, either. His name is not heard on any tours of historic Boston. Nor does he appear on the list of “Highlights of Black Boston” for the Boston African

¹¹⁰ Boston National Historical Park, “Salem Poor: ‘A Brave and Gallant Soldier,’” National Park Service. <http://www.nps.gov/bost/planyourvisit/upload/Salem%20Poor%202-14-01.pdf> (accessed May 17, 2010).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

American National Historic Site. The presence and contributions of African Americans, enslaved and free, within the city of Boston have been ignored as regards the revolutionary experience.

There are a number of organizations that oversee aspects of the Freedom Trail. One is the Freedom Trail Foundation, a non-profit preservation organization that operates walking tours and prints guides of the trail. One such guide, *The Freedom Trail Guide*, does nothing to improve upon the National Park Service's incomplete message. The guide covers the "sixteen essential locations" of the Freedom Trail, but does so in terms of their significance to white Bostonians and the prominent and wealthy in Boston during the revolutionary era. In a side note when discussing the Boston Massacre, Crispus Attucks is described as a figure of minor importance who was appropriated by the abolition movement as an "African-American hero."¹¹² At the end of the guide guests are encouraged to step off the trail and experience other sites to enrich their experience. One is the "Black Heritage Trail," which the guide introduces by explaining that there were a number of slaves in Boston in the eighteenth century and a growing free black population. While this explanation is more complete than the National Park Service discussion of the trail and the African-American contribution, it is still minimal in its discussion.

The Freedom Trail Foundation also provides walking tours that cover specific topics and are guided by costumed interpreters. Separate from the Freedom Trail tour, they offer an "African-American Patriots Tour" giving visitors a glimpse at African-

¹¹² Sam Jones and Tavia Malone, *Freedom Trail Guide: Walk into History on the Freedom Trail*. (Boston: The Freedom Trail Foundation, 2009), 25.

American history in Boston ranging from the Revolution through the abolition movement and into the Civil War era. The tour is guided by interpreters costumed as Phyllis Wheatley, Crispus Attucks, Peter Salem or Prince Hall. The guide proclaims of these tours “It’s American history, but not the same old story.”¹¹³ Sadly, the interpretation presented by the foundation is the same old story. It is an exclusionary American history that tries to hide its racial element in special topics. As is typical, an American history that only tells part of the story all of the time. Moreover, while the standard Freedom Trail Tour is given regularly five times a day, the African-American Patriots Tour is not given regularly and must be reserved in advance. The Freedom Trail Foundation could easily tell the entire story in a fresh new way by merging the two tours, telling guests about an American history that is complex, unified, and complete.¹¹⁴

Boston is not the only city guilty of obscuring its African-American history. Philadelphia, too, does not include the contribution of African-Americans to the revolutionary or early republic narrative. Similarly, historic Philadelphia also presents a predominately white narrative to guests who walk the streets and experience the many heritage sites. The “Historic Philadelphia Gazette” given to all visitors as a helpful guide to events and tours does not make a point of the historic African-American elements of the city. To find the African-American history of the city, guests must seek out a brochure entitled “Pennsylvania Quest for Freedom: Philadelphia,” the result of an initiative by several organizations and funded by the state to enrich understanding of

¹¹³ Ibid, 42.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

African-American history. This brochure leads guests through many eras of African-American contributions to Philadelphia's history. It includes mention of sites owned and operated by many organizations and encourages guests to interact with the African-American history present at these sites. "Quest for Freedom" is the frankest document available in urban interpretation as it presents slavery openly and encourages guests to understand the city as a site of interactions between whites and non-whites and free and unfree residents and visitors. In some cases, "Quest for Freedom" introduces alternate methods of understanding popular sites that transcend interpretation at the sites themselves. For example, the coverage of Independence Hall and Congress Hall begins by classifying the site as one of "contradictions and controversy," including several examples of legislation meant to limit freedom in opposition to the more celebrated pieces that were meant to guarantee it.¹¹⁵ This type of introduction to the more challenging issues of Philadelphia's history should be available in all guest documents and on tours of these significant sites. Their omission only seeks to gloss over the less pleasant and celebrated aspects of the Founding, the very elements that guests would find intriguing.

There is recent evidence that the City of Philadelphia and its inhabitants are interested in the development of a better interpretation that acknowledges the slave heritage of the city. This can be seen in the controversy surrounding the new "President's House" exhibit planned for opening in 2010. Controversy over the exhibit began when the new Liberty Bell Center was planned and constructed in 2001. The Center was placed

¹¹⁵ Pennsylvania Quest for Freedom: Philadelphia, "African-American Heritage Trail Special Edition, Audacious Freedom: American-Americans in Philadelphia, 1776 – 1876"

at the site of the earliest President's House in Philadelphia, a location that both Washington and Adams occupied, and a site that historically included a slave dwelling and benefited from slave labor. This residence, even before its presidential connection, had a long slave history. The failure of the National Park Service to consider the African-American contribution in exhibit design and to largely ignore the full significance of the President's House site led to public outcry, led by historian Gary Nash, the Mayor of Philadelphia, and concerned residents. The new President's House Center with exhibits will present the history of the nine slaves that served President Washington and the contradictions within the language of freedom presented in the city. The language and content of the exhibits have been made widely available for public comment. The volume of public concern in Philadelphia over this interpretation and the insistence on its importance is powerful evidence that Americans want to see real history in their heritage sites that includes multiple voices and presents complex issues to the public.¹¹⁶

* * *

Worthy of consideration in any discussion of African American interpretation is the impact of creating a single and unified narrative that takes into account all voices concurrently. Does this lessen or trivialize the independent African American contribution? As interpretation currently exists at most heritage sites the slave and free black experience is given special attention. It is an aspect of plantations and some urban

¹¹⁶ Detailed explanation of the road to the President's House exhibit can be found in Gary Nash, "For whom will the Liberty Bell toll? From Controversy to Cooperation," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: The New Press, 2006), 75 – 102. Further discussion and the text of the new exhibits that were available for public comment can be found at www.ushistory.org/presidentshouse.

interpretations that guests are encouraged to slow down and experience. The creation of this separate story has given great opportunity for the creation of truly inspired special programs. Creation of a unified narrative at these sites does not seek to restrict special programs or lessen the African – American voice. The creation of a more complete narrative, among other benefits, would develop the opportunity to create more special programs and enrich those that already exist. Many current special programs begin with an acknowledgement that slavery existed in the location; this has to be done because it has not been acknowledged on the main tour. Creating a unified main narrative introduces guests from the very beginning to the idea that history is inclusive and that many people working at the same time created what they have seen. Special programs can then expand to discuss the topics from a more complete perspective. The topic of Atlantic crossings alone provides enough comparison to keep guests busy in a single special program. It gives the opportunity to explore what experiences are shared and which are exclusive in a given location. This is a better use of special program time and creates a more complete and fulfilling historical experience for guests.

Of additional concern is the receptiveness of guests to such an experience. If the experience at Colonial Williamsburg represents the “white fantasy,” then what could be said of an improved narrative? Will the loss of fantasy translate into loss of revenue? The issue of guest experience and difficulties of emotional response has been covered recently in a growing historiography on public history and slavery. James Oliver Horton, a historian who has written on this topic extensively, argues that the emotional response of both whites and blacks to the experience of slavery has created an atmosphere that

discourages interpretation of slavery at historic sites. Horton provides a number of examples of these emotional responses, most notably the reaction to the 1994 slave auction at Colonial Williamsburg and a 1995 Library of Congress exhibit of plantation photographs entitled “Back of the Big House: The Cultural Landscape of the Plantation” as evidence that slavery over one hundred years later still creates strong and disturbing responses. Horton also argues that the inability to face this past has delayed a greater discussion and understanding of modern race in America. When addressing the issues at Colonial Williamsburg, Horton describes a white audience disturbed by the display, but also protests by the NAACP who argue that displays such as the slave auction are used as entertainment rather than education at the expense of African-American interpreters. Protesters argued that the suffering of the slave community was trivialized and put on display for the pleasure of a paying white audience.¹¹⁷ Based on Horton’s analysis, it is clear that slavery evokes a strong response among all who interact with it in a modern sense. Guests may be interested or horrified, but either way they are engaged. This strong response should be seen as encouragement to more fully incorporate the narrative of slavery into all facets of public history, particularly the heritage tourism experience.

Similarly, John Michael Vlach, the designer of the controversial Library of Congress exhibit of plantation photographs entitled “Back of the Big House,” argues that while the exhibit was unsettling it was ultimately successful. The exhibit contained rarely seen photographs from the Library of Congress collections that depicted African-American plantation life during Reconstruction and through the early twentieth century.

¹¹⁷ James Oliver Horton, “Presenting Slavery: The Perils of Telling America’s Racial Story,” *The Public Historian* 21, no. 4 (Autumn, 1999): 19 – 38.

In some photographs, for example, African-Americans toiled under white overseers, an image that proved particularly psychologically troubling for African-American Library of Congress employees. While the Library of Congress removed the display within hours due to staff complaints, it was then displayed at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Library in Washington, D.C., where it experienced great success. People were interested in the exhibit, flocked to see it, and ultimately were moved and educated by the experience. Vlach explains that the Martin Luther King, Jr. Library made the exhibit interactive and encouraged guests to write about the way the exhibit made them feel. These impressions were then put into a large format and displayed with the exhibit to create a conversation about slavery. One comment read, “After [I] finished looking at the exhibit, I shed tears for the people who shed their blood so that we may have a chance to live. I like the exhibition. It gives me a sense of who I am and where I am from and the values of my culture. We should learn to forgive but never forget.”¹¹⁸ An honest presentation of slavery creates these important conversations. It causes people to think critically about their history and to understand it in a new fullness. Challenging the preconceived notions of American public memory and causing participants to think differently about the past should always be the goal of public historians. Unfortunately, instead many institutions of public history cling to what is comfortable and marketable, creating ignorance and stagnation. It is this stagnation in the area of difficult history that has inspired the recent historiographical debates on interpretation and the presentation of race.

¹¹⁸ John Michael Vlach, “The Last Great Taboo Subject: Exhibiting Slavery at the Library of Congress,” in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: The New Press, 2006), 67.

The existing historiography of slavery and its interpretation explores many aspects of the problem. It covers the interest in slavery and the African-American condition in popular media, explores memory, and tackles the tough theoretical questions of race in America. However, what is not really explored is lasting implementation of the required changes on a larger scale. Several historians have identified significant problems with the interpretation of race and slavery in America complete with the analysis of truly disturbing data. They have not worked toward the development of practicable solutions to the problem, only opined that solutions are necessary. Heritage sites are attempting to find their own ways to deal with the problem, and others not. Some are resting in stasis, keeping the same interpretation that has existed over decades. Some are spending money to expand special programs or develop politically correct exhibits to be tacked on to the existing narratives. Ultimately, all of these efforts are unsatisfactory. They continue to perpetuate the problem by refusing to fully alter existing narratives. It does not matter how many additional narratives are written and presented or how excellent these narratives are, if they remain separate they will always be inferior and misleading. Programming directors and educators must take a step forward and make a commitment to the public and popular memory. They must present single narratives that tell the whole story in an accurate way, no matter how challenging, disturbing, or unpopular.

Tourists visit historic sites to understand their history, they want to learn. Creating a new unified narrative will provide more value and understanding, which guests actively seek. If guests find that their comfort level is affected, this is a positive outcome. American history cannot continue in popular memory to be a vague and

positive moment of nationalism and freedom when that is not the reality. American history has negative elements that must be acknowledged. Americans are taught in primary and secondary school classrooms that the Revolution and Founding were great moments of American freedom, but they are not instructed to fully consider the denial of that freedom to millions of others. While many Americans are aware of slavery they do not understand it in historical context. This is most true for the eighteenth century. Nineteenth-century slavery has received more attention popularly because of the Civil War. Eighteenth-century sites have the opportunity to tell a lesser-known story and a more accurate story about the roots of American slavery than is available at other locations. The foundations of the nineteenth-century condition of slavery existed in these locations and influenced the creation of the new national government. If Americans have not yet discovered that America was built on the backs of slaves, then it is time to make this clear. Ignorance can no longer be accepted and understanding can no longer be a choice.

As interpretation at sites such as Colonial Williamsburg, Middleton Place, and Boston National Historical Park have shown, the separate approach to the African-American narrative is ineffective. Americans are not engaging actively with the truth about their past, neither are historic sites forcing them to do so. Understanding a larger picture than that which is comfortable and popular is a matter of choice and encouragement. In this manner the African-American portion of the narrative has been trivialized and set aside, presented as secondary material at best. Americans currently encounter some acknowledgement at most Southern sites and cities that slavery existed.

This does not occur in all locations even though in many of them the actual fact of slavery is unavoidable; typically the acknowledgement of slavery must be looked for. It is hidden away as in the kitchen at Shirley Plantation or in the basement at Berkeley Plantation. In the North, it is even harder to find. The very existence of slaves is difficult to locate and even more difficult to understand with any significant meaning.

The overall message about slavery that is being conveyed through educational programs and pamphlets is that African-American slaves existed – something that most guests are already vaguely aware of. Nonetheless, this acknowledgement is sometimes presented as shameful, sometimes as uncomfortable, and sometimes trivialized as a marginal aspect of day to day life. It is clear through interpretive programs that slaves worked. In the South, for instance, it is clear that slaves did agricultural work on plantations such as rice cultivation. In cities North and South the work of slaves is unclear. In most locations the separate narrative reinforces an idea that slaves lived a separate life. Here interpretive programs diverge. Sites such as Drayton Hall begin their story with the Middle Passage, but more, like Mount Vernon, begin with wills and dower to explain the existence of chattel slavery in the location. In some programs it is explained that slaves had their own rooms or dwellings, that they had garden plots, that there were rules that governed their existence. Sites such as Boone Hall Plantation go even farther and explain the social life of slaves, spirituals, customs, and crafts. Overall, the impression given of slavery is that it was a system of on-site employees. Slaves were people who lived at the plantation or in the city and did different jobs than the owners of the business. The business analogy works well for American tourists who understand the

demands of wealth and success as part of cultural conditioning. During the eighteenth century, agriculture was a business and slaves were the workers that provided the labor, this is the easy interpretation given to guests. But, this interpretation has created a place for slavery in popular memory that is invalid, one that is comfortable and unrealistic and denies the status of slaves or the violence of the slave system. Perhaps, as historian Peter Wood has suggested, plantations should sometimes be referred to as “slave labor camps,” to create a meaningful connection for guests.¹¹⁹

Certainly, changes to the interpretation of slavery will differ by location based on current programs and available materials at the sites. Not every site can or should tell the same story on any given topic, this includes slavery. Every site must spend time doing the research to learn about the slaves that lived there. Where did they come from? What did they do? How did they experience the site? What can this teach visitors? The use of primary and secondary sources is essential. The same careful research and development that goes into the interpretive plan should be employed in the development of slavery in heritage tourism. In essence, every site must undergo a new interpretive planning process to determine the place of slavery within the overall narrative and the best way to create a true and historically accurate presentation. This is the only way that integration of slavery can successfully occur. It must begin with an approach that takes the site from the ground up, with an eye on inclusiveness and the creation of a unified narrative.

¹¹⁹ Peter Wood, “Slave Labor Camps in Early America: Overcoming Denial and Discovering the Gulag,” in *Inequality in Early America*, ed. Carla Gardina Pestana and Sharon V. Salinger (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1999), 230-231.

Flaws in the individual interpretive planning process have made a significant contribution to the problem of slave interpretation at heritage sites. Slave programs originally were add-ons to existing planning approaches instead of integral components of the plan itself. Subsequent interpretive plans or revisions to tour programs considered only the central narrative and tour. Programs on slavery were developed as a special afterthought, but not part of the essential narrative, so they were not part of these revisions. Changing this is a radical and fundamental change that will create resistance at many historic sites. But a clean slate is the only way to develop fresh and accurate new approaches. It will doubtless create very difficult conversations among staff and docents who will be required to give this presentation daily to an audience that may not always be receptive. There will be a tendency to minimize the interpretation, hold to older traditions, or keep unsavory elements of the past silent to keep tour groups happy. These issues must be addressed and historical silences cannot be accepted. Change is difficult; docents should understand themselves as ambassadors of a new interpretation and as active participants in a new conversation about America's racial and slave past.

The new interpretation that must develop in public history is one that creates a unified narrative of American history that is frank and honest about race relations. In historic residences, it is important that guests understand who lived in the residence; this includes owners, renters, slaves, and servants. How did these historical actors interact? How did each experience the space? How does interior architecture and planning bear out relationships and hierarchies within the space? The significance of interior and exterior space as part of the interpretation is essential. At plantations, the interaction between

interiors and exteriors, division of labor, and wealth and enslavement should be very open. For example, visitors to eighteenth-century South Carolina described planters as lazy people who watched their slaves do the work of the plantation without participating or directing the work themselves in large part. This is an important story that would present a significant surprise to most guests. Many heritage tourists to plantations do not realize that when they visit the home of “cotton planters” or “tobacco planters” that the owners of the residence were not doing any physical planting or culling; indeed, they may only have irregularly lived there. The history of eighteenth-century labor, wealth, and capital are waiting to be told.

Inevitably discussions of violence and unpleasantness will proceed from this new conversation. It is an essential component. Slavery was a condition of force and coercion. It was maintained by physical and psychological violence. This culture of violence created by slave owners was socially acceptable in America, and criticized but accepted in other parts of the world. The violence of the slave system and the Southern tendency to become desensitized to it has been well documented by historians. This created a resultantly violent and strongly patriarchal culture evidenced by the lasting tradition of dueling and blood sports in the South. This uncomfortable story is not being told currently and as difficult as it may seem, it must be introduced. Much in the manner that the stocks are described by African-American docents at Colonial Williamsburg, guests must understand that slaves were not slaves by choice and their condition was secured by force. This is not to suggest re-enacted daily rapes and beatings of employees, but guests should understand that punishment was deemed necessary to control slaves and that

violence took many forms. Documents at specific sites will direct the discussion of this topic. Plantation records were frequently meticulous. Lists of tool replacements could provide evidence of passive resistance. In addition, some owners kept records of punishments, some documented their slave children, and some preferred to sell problematic slaves. This is to say nothing of incidents of active slave rebellion, which provide evidence of violence from both sides. Visitors must understand the violent nature of slavery to truly understand its impact on all Americans, regardless of their race or region.

Americans associate their history with the history of freedom and its attainment and maintenance. An overwhelmingly positive narrative, the history of American freedom is considered essential to understanding the American character. The discussion of slavery fits with the conversation about American freedom in essential ways and must be broached in a manner that allows it to fit with this existing narrative. Not to make the story of slavery positive, but to ensure that Americans understand that the story of slavery is a story about freedom that is also important to their understanding. At a very basic level, heritage tourists must learn that American arguments about freedom in the eighteenth century were rife with hypocrisy. This fact was understood at the time by Americans and their European allies and enemies. During the high ideals of the Early Republic and the Founding, Americans lived willingly in hypocrisy. While many founders had something to say about this hypocrisy, they did little to actually address it—especially as many of them were slaveholders. Those who were not slaveholders understood the importance of the maintenance of slavery for the maintenance of union.

Americans also understood their right to property as one of the fundamental rights of man, as described by Enlightenment thinkers and codified in the laws of the nascent republic.

Slaves were considered property, not persons, a fact that heritage tourists must be confronted with unavoidably. It was such a lack of understanding that caused the problem at Colonial Williamsburg over ten years ago, when a slave auction introduced guests to this elemental fact in an abrupt and incomplete manner. Middleton Place also struggles with this fact with their indirect language on the nature of the Middleton property. This identification of a person as property may be a fact more disturbing to guests than the associated violence. The idea of a human being as mere property to be bought and sold, controlled and owned, indicates an utter lack of respect. It also denies the credibility of the basic American freedoms being celebrated while the institution persisted. Americans believe in a society that is founded on self-determination. The condition of slavery represents a full lack of this essential idea, a contradiction of founding principles. It is a disturbing and difficult problem to correct, but it must be addressed for the conversation to progress and for American history to be understood in an accurate and meaningful way. Guests will resist this idea, it will contradict their primary education and public memory. It will change the way they understand everything about their country, they will argue with docents, walk out of tours, and write negative reviews. However, for every resistant guest, there will be an appreciative one. There will be one that is touched, that has learned, and that is interested in moving forward with a new perspective on what it means to be an American and the struggle to achieve that status.

The other conversation about freedom that can be had at many heritage sites is one of slave emancipation and freedom. Depending on the location and documents available multiple examples of the meaning of freedom for slaves are possible. Locations that discuss freedom as an essential component of the narrative, such as Philadelphia, Boston, or Williamsburg, could integrate the meaning of revolutionary rhetoric for the enslaved, as is currently being explored in the development of the President's House exhibit. In Boston, slaves petitioned the Massachusetts Assembly to consider their freedom and as we have seen, both free and enslaved African-Americans fought during the revolution. In locations that do not discuss the rhetoric and fight for freedom, the individual fight for freedom can be the focus.

Heritage tourists are also interested in the topic of runaway slaves. This is clear from the popularity of Underground Railroad sites and the theme of runaway slaves that exists in popular culture depicting the period. Books, movies, and television shows have depicted eighteenth and nineteenth-century runaways as essential characters since the time of Eliza and Uncle Tom. Many plantations have records of slaves that ran away and advertisements in local newspapers provide additional information about runaways that can be used effectively as part of an interpretive plan. Michael Gomez in *Exchanging our Country Marks* draws many important conclusions about the condition of slaves and their experience in the eighteenth century based on runaway slave advertisements.¹²⁰ This methodology can also be employed by interpreters.

¹²⁰ Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998)

Public historians can engage in this work at their own sites and develop conversations about the desire for freedom within the condition of slavery. Discussion of runaways cannot be had however, without a conversation about the realities of the slave experience. Runaways cannot be appropriated as a topic that is exciting for guests without also understanding that guests must be presented with the reasons slaves ran away. This is why runaways are not presented currently outside of Underground Railroad sites. An admission that a slave ran away is an admission that there was something to run away from. It creates a tear in the carefully crafted fabric of history that currently exists. Slaves are rarely presented as anything other than compliant within comfortable, superficial narratives. Presentation of runaways provides evidence of dissatisfaction and shows white owners that are the subject of current dominant narratives as not fully the blameless persons they are made out to be. Most importantly, discussion of runaways, if done appropriately, can be a useful tool to introduce many other topics related to slavery to heritage tourists such as active and passive resistance, violence, family, and culture.

If this new interpretation of slavery creates confrontation, awkward moments, and questioning, then the desired effect will have been achieved. Interpreters and guests cannot hide from a condition that impacted millions of people and profoundly changed America. The purpose of education is not to teach what is already known and what is comfortable; it is to *educate*, to inform and enlighten, to challenge assumptions and to create greater understanding. Interpreters must work to create comprehensive and sensitive programs that inform and educate while still maintaining an atmosphere that fosters understanding and questioning. The programs must be carefully crafted because

an abundance of information that is uncomfortable and presented in the wrong manner will cause anger, rather than achieve its true purpose. Guests will stop listening and engaging with heritage programs if they are not led into these topics in an appropriate manner. Integration is the appropriate manner. Creation of a balanced narrative, that includes white and black voices, that acknowledges all elements of history, triumph and tragedy, is not only more realistic but more meaningful and lasting for visitors.

Conclusion

The arguments that compose the “history wars” are fruitful in their ability to identify larger issues within American memory and the meta-narrative. They delve into the deeper historical needs of the American public and the popular way that history is conceived of, from the family level, to the local, to the national. It is clear that flaws exist within popular historical perception. What has not been clear from the “history wars” is how to develop meaningful solutions to these problems. The real world solutions to these theoretical problems are in the hands of public historians. The work of public historians in the museum field especially, has the ability to alter public memory in a lasting manner, but only through careful reassessment of interpretive plans and site narratives.

The most effective way to make these changes to public memory can be developed from utilizing realistic interpretations of everyday life. The everyday experiences of men and women, and the realities of the historical landscape are meaningful perspectives for the public to interact with at historic sites. This evidence of the everyday must be clear in every aspect of a site, from the interpretation of material culture, to characterization of historical actors, to incorporation of landscape features and city streets. Each has its part to play in developing a realistic narrative that considers multiple influences on the historical narrative and conveys the complexity of history to guests. This new history that breaks the silence of the dead house and blurs the strictures of timelines, by developing history as a narrative of cause, effect, and influence, has the ability to create a greater impact for guests than existing narratives. Within such a framework, guests have the ability to make meaningful analogies to everyday experience,

associations that will remain with them long after the visit is over. It will encourage them to reconsider the context for every historical event. The incorporation of this new perspective also has the ability to change the character of popular American history.

By developing new narratives at the residences of the nation's early presidents, Americans will have the ability to understand power in the Early Republic. The first presidents must be conveyed as they were, and not as ideal representations of the power of America today. While the prominence and significance of the early presidents should be evident, guests should also retain an understanding of these men as everyday people. Not common people, but gentlemen who lived everyday lives common to others of their station. The early presidents were also men with flaws and men who were concerned with the potentially negative implications of widespread, popular democracy. Presidential residences must give a sense of everyday life, include ancillary voices, and present the more challenging aspects of each man's history, including slave ownership. Through this interpretation, visitors will gain a better understanding of the nation's foundations and the implications and limitations of a government for the people and by the people. This alteration in public memory is essential for the development of an educated citizenry, a goal with which the founders would agree.

Understanding eighteenth-century America requires a realistic conception of the significance of landscape to the development of wealth and power. The Atlantic Ocean and the features of the landscape, such as rivers, shaped the development of America as a prosperous part of an Atlantic empire. This aspect of America's history is not frequently interpreted at heritage sites, which represents a significant omission that must be altered

in order to foster a good sense of the everyday in the eighteenth-century and change public perception of the period. The Atlantic and the river system were significant aspects of everyday life that affected the flows of goods, people, and communication. Every aspect of American life that guests can expect to encounter at historic sites, both urban and rural, can be connected to either the Atlantic or river context, if not both. Developing this new context, which encourages guests to interact more fully with geography and the natural world, brings visitors closer to interacting with everyday life in the eighteenth century. This context alters public memory by altering the setting of American history. This new setting—one that considers water as well as land—changes the context of the Colonial, Revolutionary, and Early Republic periods. The best way to build understanding is through conveying the everyday importance of the landscape and Atlantic context.

Everyday life should be evident at every historic site in an attempt to create greater connections to guests and better fact retention. The historic house museum is a powerful tool in this endeavor. While it may sometimes be difficult to make the analogies necessary to understand the Atlantic context in its everyday context, a residence may be the easiest type of location to make these connections. For many guests, a house is the obvious location of everyday life, because it is where their everyday life happens, too. Interpretation and narrative changes at historic house museums must work to infuse life into the traditional narrative. Many historic house museums currently fall into the trap of the “dead house,” as they fail to communicate a realistic sense of life as lived within the walls of the structure. Primary sources, landscape elements, and thoughtful staging must

come together to create life and vibrancy within the historic house museum. This alteration in the historic residence tour will change public memory by creating a sense of history as more than isolated events, by fleshing out a period that was lived by real people who experienced the events of history and were impacted by them. By creating a history that is more realistic, one that emphasizes the everyday and living character of the historical actors, interpreters will be able to alter perceptions of the past. Moreover, such perceptions must also be altered by changing the concept of where life was lived in the eighteenth century.

The streets and gardens of the eighteenth-century urban centers, just as on the landscape at rural locations, should represent important locations to the historical narrative. In an urban center, life was lived not just in the commercial and residential structures; it also included the streets and gardens. Urban communities were composed of vibrant interactions of historical actors representing many races, classes, and occupations. The streets and gardens were locations of business and leisure, not just paths to tread. The significance of the urban landscape to life in the eighteenth century must enter the public consciousness. Just as modern American life occurs outside the home, so, too, did eighteenth-century life, a fact that conveys the everyday and creates meaningful comparison for guests. As is the case with the inclusion of the Atlantic and river contexts, integrating interpretations of the urban landscape is a change that has the potential to impact the meta-narrative. It alters the setting of American history for guests. It allows historical events to take on new meanings and encourages guests to look in their own neighborhoods for the meaning of American community. The urban landscape of the

eighteenth-century is not as far distant from modern American experience as are other, more difficult topics of the period, like slavery.

The topic of slavery is one of the current hot-button topics of the “history wars.” The cure to the selective amnesia that has been identified in public memory in connection to slavery can be achieved by the work of public historians who insist on its thorough and realistic interpretation. The fact of slavery is one that cannot be avoided or overlooked. While interpretation of slavery falls into the category of difficult history, it cannot be set aside for an easier or more comfortable narrative. One of the biggest changes that must be made to public memory is in the identification of American history as complex and challenging. American history was not always good and the goal of “freedom” has often been a convenient word to euphemistically cover up all manner of horrors. The new narratives developed at historic sites must be inclusive. They must incorporate all possible voices, all possible influences, to create unified narratives that convey the realities of everyday life. Slavery was a reality of everyday life in eighteenth-century America and must remain so in narratives of the period. Currently, interpretation of slavery has been hindered at historic sites by the place of slavery in public memory. Americans have difficulty facing the deeper racial issues of the national past. However, this public memory, one that typically chooses to forget what it does not want to remember, cannot persist. It hinders the ability of Americans to understand their past with honesty, and stops them from thoughtfully considering the issues of race in America that still exist.

This study has only scratched the surface of the work that needs to be done to alter the public memory as regards difficult or under-represented historical issues of the eighteenth century. While issues of gender and the lower class might have been included in greater detail, they have not been the focus of this study. The scholarly literature on the theoretical and social constructions of these categories is deep and has not found its way to public history or the “history wars” in large part. Further development of difficult history interpretation, beginning with race and slavery, will pave the way for these issues and their representation. Public historians must first develop the methods and practices necessary to introduce and interpret difficult history to the public before delving into these new challenges to the public memory.

Development of a greater understanding of American history in the public memory serves many purposes. It develops a greater understanding of the truth of the American past and develops within Americans a critical eye with which to understand their position in their nation and in the world. It will open up new conversations about difficult elements of the past such as race, class, gender, Native American issues, and foreign policy decisions. It will allow public historians more freedom in the development of exhibits, in obtaining funding for projects, and in the fight to preserve the nation’s heritage, palatable or not. Finally, this alteration in public memory will stimulate activism, a powerful force in American society.

These changes in interpretation and narrative will admittedly not be easy to accomplish based on time and funding. Change at heritage sites is relatively slow. Heritage locations are businesses behind the scenes, with many individuals responsible

for the narrative, interpretation, and ticket sales. Many have boards of directors and other individuals that must agree with the changes before they can proceed. In addition to the many layers of approval needed, funding is also an issue. While some larger heritage sites are well funded by endowments and active member campaigns, others survive on small budgets that rely almost completely on outside funding such as donations or use of the grounds for weddings and parties in order to stay operational. Some of the changes necessary at heritage sites will be expensive. They will require interpretive planning, consultants in some cases, and many hours of research. Trial and error should be expected, and retraining of existing docent staff will be required. Also, the creation of an integrative narrative will eliminate programs that may have been developed through similarly costly initiatives. And the result of this new expenditure of time, funding, and research may be narratives that are not initially popular with staff or visitors.

Change is not easy in any capacity. This is especially true at heritage locations that have been operating under the same narrative or with the same staff for many years. The history being conveyed has become comfortable and visitors continue to come, so a sense of urgency may be absent. In addition to these facts, the new narratives being developed will integrate difficult topics, in some cases ones that visitors and docents may not readily accept. The reason difficult history is difficult is that it stirs up emotions, creates discomfort, and challenges popular conventions of history. Docents may not want to convey a narrative that causes friction or disruption of the tour environment. Similarly, visitors may not initially be receptive to a narrative that causes discomfort. However, the

implementation of these changes is essential to advancing the public memory and furthering the work of public historians to educate.

While the work of altering public memory through heritage sites may seem like a daunting task, it will be worth the effort. It will create guests that are better informed and that are challenged by the presentation. These new narratives will encourage inquiry and discussion on tours, creating an exciting and thought-provoking experience for staff and visitors. Conveyance of the everyday and development of inclusive narratives will solve existing problems such as fact retention and return visitation rates. Altering public memory will grind a new lens through which Americans can understand their history and their future. This new public memory will help make it possible to remove the barriers of difficult history and allow Americans to understand their history for what it is, challenging, unique, and deep. Finally, these changes will create activism, a public invested in their past and interested in its retention for future generations. The task at hand is not only achievable, it is essential to the creation of a more educated and active American citizenry.

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