

Hands-on History: Living History Museums and Children's History Education

Katherine Siebenaler

Composition 211

Dr. Nydegger

November 19, 2012

One summer my family and I visited Colonial Williamsburg, the historically reenacted section of Williamsburg, Virginia. While we were there, I had the opportunity to visit the “gaol” (the old-fashioned name for “jail”), stand in the ballroom of the Governor’s Palace, and try out the stocks. My sister played a song on the harpsichord in the cabinet-maker’s shop, while I had bread “stolen” from me in a demonstration of the court system. Living history museums, whether on a large scale like Colonial Williamsburg or on a smaller scale like Rocky Mount in East Tennessee, can provide fun and exciting activities for children. Candle-making, role-playing, and other historical activities provide children with a glimpse from the past, teaching them about life in that particular time period.

However, some aspects of living history museums produce problems. The educational benefits for children are questionable. The museums research in depth, but how much solid history are the children actually learning? Living history museums do provide history education and thoroughly research their area, but do not always accurately portray their research, which results in questionable history education for children. In order to provide a better history education, the museums need to ensure that they correctly portray history while teachers can involve children in more activities to be sure they are receiving a beneficial history education.

### **Hands-On History: The Educational Methods and Benefits of Living History Museums**

“Walking the streets and lanes, entering the restored homes, taverns and public buildings, standing in the gardens and yards conjures up an image of what Williamsburg once was. These experiences cannot be reproduced in the classroom.”<sup>1</sup> Living history museums provide a unique educational experience that, as John Krugler, a professor of history at Marquette University,

---

<sup>1</sup> John D. Krugler, “Stepping Outside the Classroom: History and the Outdoor Museum,” *Journal of American Culture* 12, no. 2 (1989): 83. Humanities International Complete (21330283).

states, “cannot be reproduced in the classroom.”<sup>2</sup> These museums utilize different methods such as immersion, interpretation, and activities to offer children a different way to learn history.

Living history museums certainly hold a key for history education. Anthony Pattiz in his article “Teaching History as the Reenactment of Past Experience” notes, “According to a recent survey released by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), history appears to be a mystery to most high-school seniors. Fifty-seven percent did not answer enough questions correctly to reach the ‘basic’ knowledge category stipulated in the survey.”<sup>3</sup> While this survey covered seniors, if children graduating from high school after twelve years of school are still not proficient in history, how much less proficient are younger children? While history education may be deficient, another problem may be, as Henrik Zipsane notes,

[b]ut for some people—children and adults alike—the classroom does not work as well as for other people. They often learn the traditional school subjects better in other surroundings....Natural and cultural environments offer both a complementary and alternative learning surroundings [sic] and...the open air museum...combines both!”<sup>4</sup>

While an “open air museum”<sup>5</sup> may be somewhat different, the same principle could hold true for living history museums. “The academic view notwithstanding, outdoor historic museums have emerged as important purveyors of knowledge about America’s past....As outdoor historic museums have matured and assumed a greater role in the dissemination of historical knowledge, academic historians have become more aware of them as research and teaching institutions.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Krugler, “Stepping Outside the Classroom,” 83.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Pattiz, “Teaching History as the Reenactment of Past Experience,” *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* 30, no. 1 (2005): 15, Education Research Complete (16870527).

<sup>4</sup> Henrik Zipsane, “Learning Opportunities in Open Air Museums—An Enormous Challenge!” *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 55, no. 2 (2010): 43,. SocINDEX with Full Text (57356023).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 434.

<sup>6</sup> Krugler, “Stepping Outside the Classroom,” 79.

Another group that sees the educational benefits from living history museums is “parents,”<sup>7</sup> as Ellen Rosenthal and Jane Blankman-Hetrick of Conner Prairie, a living history museum in Fishers, Indiana, note: “Asked how they expected to benefit from the visit to Conner Prairie, most parents reiterated the importance of enhancing formal education, particularly for their children.”<sup>8</sup> While parents and their children may not be a school group (except in the case of a homeschooling family), the parents are still expecting educational benefits from their visit to a living history museum, even if the children are not.<sup>9</sup> However, T.J. DeWitt of Rocky Mount Museum, a living history museum in Tennessee, comments, “Many times, we have children return with their parents, weeks after a school trip, and delightfully show their parents what they learned on their last visit, often with incredible retention to the details.”<sup>10</sup> Experts see the educational potential these living history museums possess.

One of the educational benefits of living history museums is the experience itself. Jay Anderson of Western Kentucky University states: “Living history was considered a good way of making ‘history come alive’ at museums and historic sites often considered stuffy and dull.”<sup>11</sup> This experience could be helpful, especially for children, as DeWitt notes: “Most children are fully engaged with this natural combination of visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning styles.”<sup>12</sup> Anderson describes this benefit: “In 1969, Deetz explored ‘The Reality of the Pilgrim Fathers’ and suggested that a step into the time capsule of re-created Plimoth evokes a living community of Pilgrims—its smoky odors, animal noises, and house-hold clutter—and dispels our

---

<sup>7</sup> Ellen Rosenthal and Jane Blankman-Hetrick, “Conversations Across Time: Family Learning in a Living History Museum.” in *Learning Conversations in Museums*, edited by Gaea Leinhardt, Kevin Crowley, and Karen Knutson (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2002), 318.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 318.

<sup>10</sup> T.J. DeWitt, e-mail message to Katherine Siebenaler, November 13, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Jay Anderson, “Living History: Simulating Everyday Life in Living Museums,” *American Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1982): 295, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2712780>

<sup>12</sup> DeWitt, e-mail message to Katherine Siebenaler, November 13, 2012.

misconceptions and stereotypes.”<sup>13</sup> The experience of living history museums potentially educates the visitors, including children, in unconventional ways.

While experiencing the sights and sounds of history is one educational benefit for children, another benefit may be helping those with learning difficulties better understand history. Zipsane also states, “People who have learning difficulties in other environments suddenly become more efficient learners in a museum. This means that the museum can create positive learning experiences for people who under other circumstances actually are seen as losers.”<sup>14</sup> This could be helpful for special education school groups or families who homeschool their children with learning disabilities. For such children, the living history museum experience offers an alternative approach to learning history, adding to living history museums’ benefits.

Living history museums use many methods to offer their brand of learning history to the visitors, one of which is immersion in the history itself. As the quotation from Krugler in the introduction indicates,<sup>15</sup> utilizing the other senses can immerse the visitors in history. Children especially could benefit from this, as they may not be able to read display signs at a conventional museum or history books as well as adults. In addition, they will gain a first-hand look at the historical setting. The setting of a living history museum is one way that children in particular can better learn and learn differently about history.

Activities are still another way that living history museums educate children. In his study on living history, Zipsane notes that “the method of time-travel is most efficient with the youngest children.”<sup>16</sup> This indicates that these hands-on activities are helpful in working with children. Zipsane also discusses the programs that Jamtli, “a Cultural History and Art Museum

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 297.

<sup>14</sup> Zipsane, “The Learning Opportunities in Open Air Museums,” 438.

<sup>15</sup> Krugler, “Stepping Outside the Classroom,” 83.

<sup>16</sup> Zipsane, “The Learning Opportunities in Open Air Museums,” 436.

and an Open Air Museum in Östersund in the middle of Sweden,”<sup>17</sup> implements. These hands-on programs for children include “activities where they wash, bake, milk the cow or the goat, take care of the harvest from the fields and the timber from the forest, and other sorts of activities which formed part of everyday life in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>18</sup> Granted, these educational programs actually end up teaching the children not so much about history as about other things, such as “team work” and “that people can live in a different way from what we do now” or “that certain things belong together in order to create a full picture in the imagination.”<sup>19</sup> Jamtli also has an interactive, “role-play[ing]” educational program for “9<sup>th</sup>-grade school children” as well.<sup>20</sup> Zipsane notes the educational benefits from this program: “We have the impression that the participants in a pedagogical programme like ‘On the run!’ are learning through activation of their sense of empathy. It is the experience of being angry, nervous, excited, bored, happy, and unhappy that the participants talk about, when we later asked them about their memories from the experience.”<sup>21</sup> Another example is Conner Prairie, whose website lists several programs for children, one of which—“Indiana Indians”—has a description that notes the hands-on aspect of the program: “Celebrate Lenape Indian culture by learning about wigwams and clothing. Make a drum and listen to Indian songs.”<sup>22</sup> Rosemary Arnold of Conner Prairies notes that “[Conner Prairie’s] programs connect to Indiana Academic Standards, so they match with what students are learning in the classroom.”<sup>23</sup> These hands-on programs can offer multiple educational opportunities for children, not only immersing them in history first-hand, but also using history to teach them in broader areas.

---

<sup>17</sup> Zipsane, “Learning Opportunities in Open Air Museums,” 435.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 436.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 437.

<sup>22</sup> “Prairie Tykes and Prairie Kids Club,” Conner Prairie Interactive History Park, <http://www.connerprairie.org/Learn-And-Do/Programs/Prairie-Tykes.aspx>, accessed on November 11, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Rosemary Arnold, e-mail message to Katherine Siebenaler, November 15, 2012.

The most popular way that living history museums educate their visitors is through interpretation. This can vary from a guide taking a group to the different stops at the museum to employees dressed up and acting as if they were actually from that time period. Marek Nowacki, in “Education in Open-Air Museums in Research Studies of Visitors to the Wielkopolski Ethnographic Park in Dziekanowice,” says, “It is a tour guide showing the group round and interpreting the objects...who can significantly influence the level of knowledge acquired during a stay....The most interesting information sources were the tour guides and the museum personnel working at the exposition.”<sup>24</sup> Colonial Williamsburg contains both interpreters who act as “historical characters” and interpreters who simply wear costumes.<sup>25</sup> Those who are “historical characters” can add to the sense of being back in time, while the guides in costume can provide more factual information.<sup>26</sup> These guides can greatly influence the educational experience of the visit as they provide information to the visitors.

Interpreters in costume are an especially effective method of living history museums. Rosenthal and Blankman-Hetrick note, “At living history museums, historical characters that greet and converse with visitors are the core programming element.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, interpreters in costume are key to the way living history museums educate their visitors. Additionally, they are a unique educational method. “Interpreters talk to visitors, they [sic] do not dramatize historic vignettes as actors, nor present historic lectures,”<sup>28</sup> connecting with visitors face-to-face. Edward Chappell of Colonial Williamsburg also argues for the importance of interpreters: “At its best, playacting allows a museum to tell more complex stories and helps museum-goers move beyond

---

<sup>24</sup> Marek Nowacki, “Education in Open-Air Museums in Research Studies of Visitors to the Wielkopolski Ethnographic Park in Dziekanowice,” *Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism* 17, no. 2 (2010): 190, Supplemental Index (52620790).

<sup>25</sup> Krugler, “Stepping Outside the Classroom,” 82.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Rosenthal and Blankman-Hetrick, “Conversations Across Time,” 305.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 307.

the formal analysis of buildings and objects to their roles in the larger economic system.”<sup>29</sup> In order to educate visitors to the museums, the interpreters at Conner Prairie, for example, have “post goals, or teaching emphases for each assigned station.”<sup>30</sup> The interpreters at Conner Prairie have different methods of educating their visitors, such as “[m]onologue....[i]nterpreter prompts the entire group....[i]nterpreter interacts with adults....[i]nterpreter prompts children....[and r]eciprocal and reflexive dialogue....”<sup>31</sup> This method is helpful for children, as Rosenthal and Blankman-Hetrick note that “[i]n [one] interpreter-family interaction, the children were nearly silent, yet...they were attentive and watchful.”<sup>32</sup> They also conclude, “Learning conversation was more apt to happen between parents and children, if an interpreter had stimulated it.”<sup>33</sup> Interpreters are an important, influential, and effective method of teaching the visitors, including children, history.

Living history museums are beneficial educational tools, not only for history education, but also sometimes for broader lessons for children,<sup>34</sup> and they use different means by which to teach children. Despite the benefits of living history museums as educational tools, however, living history museums do have difficulties that present themselves in the research and portrayal of history.

### **Fact and Fiction: How Living History Museums Research and Portray History**

“See, what you don’t realize about that ‘little skit’ is that for the 10 to 15 minutes you have observed, and in some cases, even participated and/or interacted with me, there were countless hours of research and development that went into making that moment possible, many

---

<sup>29</sup> Edward A. Chappell, “Open-Air Museums: Architectural History for the Masses,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, no. 3 (1999): 338, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/991526>.

<sup>30</sup> Rosenthal and Blankman-Hetrick, “Conversations Across Time,” 309.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 313-14.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>34</sup> Zipsane, “Learning Opportunities in Open Air Museums,” 435.

times done exclusively by me.”<sup>35</sup> Living history museums carefully research whatever story they are trying to tell. However, that research does not always come across clearly to the visitors at living history museums. If the visitors are at the museums simply for pleasure, this may not be a problem. But if the visitors are a school group using the museum as a field trip, all they may gain is some entertainment or a few random facts about daily life. Living history museums conduct careful research, but do not always portray it well in their attempt to meet institutional needs.

Living history museums carefully and thoroughly research their topics. As the quotation that begins this section indicates, many hours of research go into an interpreter’s character.<sup>36</sup> Stephan P. Zacharias, the interpreter from whom the quotation is taken, also notes, “Each living history presentation you witness is as accurately researched and documented as possible, and the research never ends, even after the program has been presented to you, the public.”<sup>37</sup> “The best living museums mounted serious multi-disciplinary research programs enlisting as consultant historical archaeologists, cultural anthropologists, geographers, ‘new’ social historians, folklorists, and agricultural specialists.”<sup>38</sup> Rosemary Arnold of Conner Prairie points out that “[Conner Prairie has] built 2 buildings in Prairietown over the past few years, and both were built using period techniques and materials. (Our carpenters spent months hewing timbers by hand so our guests could see how it’s done.)”<sup>39</sup> While rigorous research is performed, Arnold also notes the time that is involved in researching: “For example, in the spring of 2011, we opened our Civil War Journey experience and developed a school program called Gone for a Soldier to go along with it. Researching for CWJ took a few years. I was one of the developers of

---

<sup>35</sup> Stephan P. Zacharias, “I Am a Living History Interpreter,” *Legacy (National Association for Interpretation)* 22, no. 6 (2011): 34, Education Research Complete (70488050).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>38</sup> Anderson, “Living History: Simulating Everyday Life in Living Museums,” 299.

<sup>39</sup> Arnold, e-mail message to Katherine Siebenaler, November 15, 2012.

Gone for a Soldier, and we worked on the research for that program for several months.”<sup>40</sup> These museums have taken much care and time to research their topics, providing visitors a chance to learn much about history.

Despite careful and thorough research, however, whatever it is the living history museums are trying to portray may not always be historically accurate. Edward Chappell gives the example of a museum in Fiji that presents a “Disneyesque landscape,” portraying one culture, but completely ignoring another culture that should be portrayed.<sup>41</sup> This scenario may be in a museum, yet the information is not completely trustworthy, since only part of the culture is presented, indicating a problem with historical accuracy. Krugler notes that sometimes the history at Colonial Williamsburg is politically correct history: “At Williamsburg this difficulty was obvious—there were simply too many anomalies. The Historic Area was too clean for a living eighteenth-century community; there were too many intrusions from this century; the picture of slavery was too benign. And there were lingering questions about historical accuracy that went unresolved.”<sup>42</sup> While Colonial Williamsburg and other similar museums have tried to fix this problem,<sup>43</sup> if it is still a problem, it means that living history museums may not be presenting children with the most accurate view of history. If educators are using these museums as part of their history education programs, they must be aware of what is accurate and what is not.

While museums may not always present history accurately, museums may also partially tell or even incorrectly represent history. Chappell notes, “It is dangerous because the choices of what to show are subjective and the relationships among the parts are largely fictitious, however

---

<sup>40</sup> Arnold, e-mail message to Katherine Siebenaler, November 15, 1012.

<sup>41</sup> Chappell, “Open-Air Museums,” 340-41.

<sup>42</sup> Krugler, “Stepping Outside the Classroom,” 82.

<sup>43</sup> Rosenthal and Blankman-Hetrick. “Conversations Across Time,” 326.

rigorously researched and assembled the fiction.”<sup>44</sup> Despite in-depth research, all the facts may still not be presented! In a discussion about one of the tours of a house that was near Colonial Williamsburg, Krugler notes, “The interpretation in the plantation house...went little beyond pointing out the artifacts and retelling myths about the house. The interpretation lacked a unifying theme. Neither the social history of the eighteenth-century occupants nor the house’s twentieth-century restorers was given sufficient attention...history did not come alive at Carter’s Grove.”<sup>45</sup> Children visiting these museums may form a partially or even completely wrong idea in their heads about what these particular times and lifestyles were like. Living history museums may not always present history accurately or completely, adversely affecting the visiting children’s education.

Another way living history museums may not present history properly is by putting the other needs of the museum, such as financial and promotional needs, first. This may be necessary, but it must be kept in mind when considering the historical accuracy of the displays. For example, Krugler notes, “The desire to attract visitors back for another visit effectively brakes historical realism.”<sup>46</sup> This is “the harsh reality of an institution engaged in...the...entertainment business.”<sup>47</sup> Krugler notes, “there are little anachronisms throughout the Historic Area, such as the annoying drone of a power mower..., to remind visitors they are still in the twentieth century. Most irritating are interruptions to the interpretations.”<sup>48</sup> These are all ways that Colonial Williamsburg, at least, was putting operational needs before historical accuracy needs. Arnold notes that this happens in Conner Prairie: “Basically we do everything we can to make sure that what we portray is accurate, but we also know that sometimes we have

---

<sup>44</sup> Chappell, “Open-Air Museums,” 340.

<sup>45</sup> Krugler, “Stepping Outside the Classroom,” 81-82.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>48</sup> Krugler, “Stepping Outside the Classroom,” 82.

to make accommodations for our guests' comfort. For example, our historic village areas have way more benches than a real village would have in 1836, but that's a small sacrifice for making sure people have a place to sit and rest."<sup>49</sup> Putting these needs first may be necessary, but they may also harm the historical accuracy, something for educators to keep in mind as they utilize living history museums.

Living history museums engage in much research, but this research does not always translate well to the visitors. This may lead to misconstrued views of the historical topics presented at these museums, thereby negatively affecting the education of the children who are coming to the museums to learn.

### **Educational Exchange: How Museums Can Improve and What Teachers Can Do**

Bland claims of educational intent are not enough... The structuring of the visit—the taking of the visitor on a journey (back in time, to encounter characters of the period and learn about some of the issues and struggles they faced) and the use of theatrical means to stimulate interest, engage the visitor interactively and thereby enhance understanding of the period—involves a fine balance between, on the one hand, pleasing the casual tourist or skeptical 13-year-old ('heritage industry entertainment', as Hewison might call it) and genuine pedagogy on the other.<sup>50</sup>

Living history museums can potentially impact the history education of young children.

However, there are some problems with the current system that need to be resolved so as to provide an even better experience with living history for children. Museums can provide better experiences and programs, while teachers can implement activities to help the children learn better.

---

<sup>49</sup> Arnold, e-mail message to Katherine Siebenaler, November 15, 1012.

<sup>50</sup> Anthony Jackson, "Inter-acting with the Past—The Use of Participatory Theatre at Museums and Heritage Sites," *Research in Drama Education* 5, no. 2 (2000): 202, Academic Search Index (3529645).

One way that living history museums can provide better experiences and better educational opportunities is to ensure that the interpreters are correctly presenting information in an exciting way that will engage and interest children. Conner Prairie's "post goals"<sup>51</sup> are an excellent way to ensure that correct information is being presented: "Each building, called a *post* by staff, has an interpretive focus with goals to convey information about the culture, economics, politics, and lifeways of 1836. Commonly referred to as *post goals*, these guide what is said and done in each building."<sup>52</sup> This method will provide interpreters with the correct information—all the research that has gone into the museum—so that they will know what they should convey to visitors. This may help prevent problems such as the lack of information at the house near Colonial Williamsburg.<sup>53</sup> It may also help with the difficulty of too much of an "entertainment" focus in the museums.<sup>54</sup> "[P]ost goals" would ensure that the information gets across, but since they are only guidelines, the interpreters would be free to make the interaction more interesting, similar to the story Rosenthal and Blankman-Hetrick tell of one interpreter who uses the "post goals" as a springboard.<sup>55</sup> Interpreters must also be sure to engage with the children in an exciting way. This can include directly talking to the children,<sup>56</sup> as "[l]earning indicators occur most frequently after the family has been engaged in discussion with an interpreter."<sup>57</sup> They must also be sure not to discourage children, as Anderson indicates: "At its worst, living history is slapstick that leaves the museum-goer more embarrassed than enlightened. The aggressive male actor posing as schoolmaster, banker, or drill sergeant has become a stock character along the

---

<sup>51</sup> Rosenthal and Blankman-Hetrick, "Conversations Across Time," 309.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Krugler, "Stepping Outside the Classroom," 81-82.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>55</sup> Rosenthal and Blankman-Hetrick, "Conversations Across Time," 309-10.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

lanes of reconstituted heritage.”<sup>58</sup> Interpreters must purposely connect with children in order to help them learn, all the while presenting them with the correct information.

While interpreters can help educate children in history, first-hand interaction—such as hands-on activities—may also increase children’s history education. Jamie Peterson notes that at Historic Murphy’s Landing, “one issue was making a particular program more hands-on for the children,”<sup>59</sup> signifying the importance of this type of learning. Jackson also points out the importance: “It is in the interactive sequences where the test is most acute—where the opportunities for discoveries about the period and for genuinely ‘dialogic’ encounters are at their fullest; and at the same time where risks of getting it wrong, or triggering a counter-productive, anti-educational experience, are at their greatest.”<sup>60</sup> Hands-on activities, therefore, are an important way for children to receive history education at living history museums. As Zipsane indicates, utilizing hands-on programs for children should not be hard: “The small children’s imaginative competences are enormous, and therefore it is relatively easy to bring the children into a fantasy world of special time and space.”<sup>61</sup> Programs such as Jamtli’s “‘On the run!’” where children take on a character and experience the character’s life<sup>62</sup> could be beneficial. The Young National Trust Theatre demonstrates another possibility, in which “[e]ach visiting group becomes involved in a narrative that, while based on fact, is fictitious, and meets a variety of costumed characters, both invented and historically ‘real’...the children know in advance they are to be involved in a story; and even more, that they will themselves be in a role.”<sup>63</sup> As Jackson indicates, “All pupils interviewed claimed they had learnt about how people lived and cited the

---

<sup>58</sup> Anderson, “Living History: Simulating Everyday Life in Living Museums,” 338.

<sup>59</sup> Jamie J. Peterson, “An Applied Evaluation at a Living History Museum,” *Journal of Interpretation Research* 12, no. 1 (2007): 72, Education Research Complete (26777003).

<sup>60</sup> Jackson, “Inter-acting with the Past,” 202.

<sup>61</sup> Zipsane, “The Learning Opportunities in Open Air Museums,” 435.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

<sup>63</sup> Jackson, “Inter-acting with the Past,” 208.

more obvious differences between now and then...”<sup>64</sup> Jackson also notes, however, “Some of the younger pupils...admitted they were not thinking about history at all, just about that was happening from moment to moment in the story.”<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the focus must be on history, not simply a comparison of life then and life now. This may be difficult for young children to grasp, so it may only work with the older grades. However, hands-on activities may still help encourage young visitors to learn.

While museums may have difficulties always teaching the visiting children history, teachers can help solve the problem with activities before and after the visit to the museum. Activities before visiting a living museum can include reading about the history that the museum represents. In his experiment of practicing living history in a high school classroom, Pattiz comments, “Secondly, students engaged in individual and group research activities that included examining specific individuals, events, issues, and/or ideas.”<sup>66</sup> Gaining a good understanding of what the museum will present will help students critically think about what the museum says and how well they say it, while also giving the students a fuller picture on the historical subject. For younger children, this may be more difficult to do, but could include some children’s history books. After the visit, teachers could follow what Arnold notes: that “[teachers] tell us that they often use the real life and hands-on experiences in our programs to build on their classroom lessons.”<sup>67</sup> Additionally, children could discuss or write a small reflection about what they learned from the museum and if it was different from what they learned in class. This is similar to what Pattiz notes about the study about which he writes, “Finally students prepared debriefing exercises in which they synthesized their newfound understanding of the issues, individuals,

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>65</sup> Jackson, “Inter-acting with the Past,” 210.

<sup>66</sup> Pattiz, “Teaching History as the Reenactment of Past Experience,” 20.

<sup>67</sup> Arnold, e-mail message to Katherine Siebenaler, November 15, 2012.

ideas, and events under examination.”<sup>68</sup> Engaging the children in analyzing and fusing information—even if it is simple in order to accommodate young children—may help them better learn history.

Living history museums can affect children’s history education in a more streamlined way by ensuring that interpreters provide the information in an exciting, yet still informative, format and providing more hands-on opportunities. Educators can ensure that the museums are beneficial and supplemental to their history curriculum by having the children research, analyze, compare, and blend the information they learn in class with the information they gain from the museums. In this way, children will learn more about history—correct history—and have fun while learning.

### **Conclusion: Engaging Education**

Living history museums provide quality educational opportunities for children, but because of their difficulty in always properly relaying their dedicated research, they may provide only “snippets of history,”<sup>69</sup> as Krugler calls them. Lois J. Barnes notes, “The Living History approach to American history is an attempt to involve students in re-creating or re-enacting the past so that the study of history becomes a personal, living experience.”<sup>70</sup> Living history museums can help form that “personal, living experience”<sup>71</sup> of the “study of history”<sup>72</sup> with the interaction with history that they provide. When children connect well with history and have fun while doing it, they will view history differently. And, as Zipsane points out, they learn more than just “the actual skills of that historical time.”<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Krugler, “Stepping Outside the Classroom,” 82.

<sup>70</sup> Lois J. Barnes, “Living History in the Junior High School Classroom,” *The History Teacher* 11, no. 4 (1978): 509, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/492546>

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Zipsane, “Learning Opportunities in Open Air Museums,” 435.

## Bibliography

- Anderson, Jay. "Living History: Simulating Everyday Life in Living Museums." *American Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1982): 290-306. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2712780>.
- Arnold, Rosemary. E-mail message to Katherine Siebenaler. November 15, 2012.
- Barnes, Lois J. "Living History in the Junior High School Classroom." *The History Teacher* 11, no. 4 (1978): 509-13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/492546>
- Chappell, Edward A. "Open-Air Museums: Architectural History for the Masses." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, no. 3 (1999): 334-41  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/991526>
- DeWitt, T.J. E-mail message to Katherine Siebenaler. November 13, 2012.
- Jackson, Anthony. "Inter-acting with the Past—The Use of Participatory Theatre at Museums and Heritage Sites." *Research in Drama Education* 5, no. 2 (2000): 204-205. Academic Search Index (3529645).
- Krugler, John D. "Stepping Outside the Classroom: History and the Outdoor Museum." *Journal of American Culture* 12, no. 2 (1989): 79-85. Humanities International Complete (21330283).
- Nowacki, Marek. "Education in Open-Air Museums in Research Studies of Visitors to the Wielkopolski Ethnographic Park in Dziekanowice." *Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism* 17, no. 2 (2010): 183-92. Supplemental Index (52620790).
- Pattiz, Anthony. "Teaching History as the Reenactment of Past Experience." *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* 30, no. 1 (2005): 15-31. Education Research Complete (16870527).

Peterson, Jamie J. "An Applied Evaluation at a Living History Museum." *Journal of Interpretation Research* 12, no. 1 (2007): 69-73. Education Research Complete (26777003).

"Prairie Tykes and Prairie Kids Club." Conner Prairie Interactive History Park.

<http://www.connerprairie.org/Learn-And-Do/Programs/Prairie-Tykes.aspx>. Accessed on November 11, 2012

Rosenthal, Ellen and Jane Blankman-Hetrick. "Conversations across time: Family Learning in a Living History Museum." In *Learning Conversations in Museums*, edited by Gaea Leinhardt, Kevin Crowley, and Karen Knutson, 305-329. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2002.

Zacharias, Stephan P. "I Am a Living History Interpreter." *Legacy (National Association for Interpretation)* 22, no. 6 (2011): 34-35. Education Research Complete (70488050).

Zipsane, Henrik. "Learning Opportunities in Open Air Museums—An Enormous Challenge!" *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 55, no. 2 (2010): 433-442. SocINDEX with Full Text (57356023).