

# **The House Enshrined**

**Great Man and Social History**

**House Museums in the**

**United States and Australia**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a study of the origins and rationale of two categories of house museum – here named ‘Great Man’ and ‘Social History’ – in the United States and Australia. An examination of cultural, social and historical change provides the context for the genres’ evolution.

The Great Man genre was born in mid nineteenth-century America when two houses associated with George Washington – Hasbrouck House and Mount Vernon – were preserved and translated to museum status. Mount Vernon quickly became the exemplar for house museums.

Civil religion, a secular nationalism that adopted the forms and rituals of church religion, focusing on hero worship, pilgrimage and contemplation of transcendent collective purpose, provided the ideology that sustained the new museum type. Great Man house museums became the shrines at which such rituals could be practiced.

In the early twentieth-century the specialization of heritage organizations encouraged a new breed of heritage professional. Largely fabric focused, these ‘new museum men’ influenced philosophy, management and conservation practice at house museums throughout the century.

Social history made its impact upon house museums in the latter decades of the twentieth century. The paradigm encouraged the creation of a new category of house museum. Existing Great Man house museums adopted some of its characteristics though never lost their hero worship foundations. In fact, I posit that the idea of hero worship was transferred to the new genre.

The birth and evolution of the two categories of house museum is demonstrated through four biographical studies: Vaucluse House in Sydney; Monticello in Charlottesville VA; the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City; and Susannah Place Museum in Sydney. I believe the findings demonstrate an argument that applies at hundreds of house museums in the United States and Australia.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis is principally a study of the origins and *raison d'être* of two categories of house museum – which I here name ‘Great Man’ and ‘Social History’ – in the United States and Australia. A house museum is characterized by its once having been a domestic residence. Though a museum type that is common and influential, house museums have received little museological analysis. I seek to address this neglect; my study accepts that house museums are artefacts that reflect and respond to their cultural environment. By focusing on the two categories, Great Man and Social History, I am able to explore developments in the whole house museum oeuvre. These are recorded in my typology of the modern house museum movement.

My typology is broad and largely chronological. My starting point is the Great Man (now encompassing great women) house museum, homes preserved for their unique association with an heroic individual and promoted as venues for patriotic pilgrimage. ‘Architectural’ house museums are houses translated to museum status for their aesthetic, usually architectural, quality. ‘Collector’s’ Houses are homes where the splendour of a collection is presented (to varying degrees) alongside the domestic circumstances of the donor collector. ‘Biographical’ house museums constitute a sub-category of the Great Man model in which the lives of great individuals are celebrated. And Social History house museums present the day-to-day experiences of ordinary, often anonymous people. Sub-categories for genres I have not examined are likely to exist. Also it should be acknowledged that overlap between categories exists, notably between Great Man and Architectural house museums and Architectural house museums and Social History.

My thesis shows that Great Man house museums are the oldest example of the modern house museum movement. Palaces, castles, and Stately Homes in Europe had been offering partial public access since the mid eighteenth-century. But until the twentieth century, in line with the creation of the National Trust in England

and professional heritage agencies in Europe, these examples remained private homes. Even today, many of those operating as museums (i.e. offering tours within controlled opening times) are still lived in by families long associated with the site. In 1837, the year of his death, Sir John Soane's Museum opened as a public site. This seminal example of a Collector's House thus became the first true house museum, offering complete visitor access on a regular basis. But I believe that the Soane's Museum was unique; it was presented less as a house than as a collection in a house, and therefore the credit for the beginnings of the modern house museum movement belongs with the Great Man house museum as born in 1850's America. It was the rescue and translation to museum status of two houses associated with George Washington, Hasbrouck House in 1850 and Mount Vernon in 1860, that established the house museum movement and the Great Man genre. Mount Vernon, George Washington's plantation home, quickly became the exemplar for all future house museums.

In this thesis, I review the mid nineteenth-century cultural context in which the Great Man genre grew. It is immediately apparent that the taste for preserving the homes of great men was dependent on hero worship, an ancient activity which assumed new life in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century thanks to the house museum concept. In a post-Civil War United States, patriotic Americans were encouraged to make pilgrimages to the shrines of America's heroic dead from both sides. It is fair to say heroes and patriotism became *the* marketing angle at Great Man house museums at that time and has remained so ever since.

A secular ideology premised on patriotism, pilgrimage and hero worship developed in mid nineteenth-century America: civil religion. Anthropologists trace a convincing transfer of the forms and rituals of church religion to secular nationalism. (Bellah 1975, 1997; Bellah & Hammond 1980; Durkheim 1997; Graburn 1989; Hayes 1966; Lowenthal 1985, 1994; Morinis 1992) Great Man house museums, created during this period of transformation, came to provide some of the prime sites for the secular ideology of civil religion: essentially religious practices such as pilgrimage, hero worship, and contemplation of transcendent collective purpose. Civil religion provided the ideology that

sustained the new museum movement; domestic religion with its focus upon the sanctity of the home encouraged the genre's success. The ideology of domestic religion was based on the belief that moral codes learnt within the home would strengthen national character when practiced in the public arena. Showing that United States heroes lived in homes not dissimilar to those of 'average' United States citizens, enhanced democratic ideology. The great man was in one sense a man like all others: the duality of the hero who is also a common man is a pretty inversion of apparent meanings, and demonstrates the capacity of myths – and house museums – to contain and exploit contradictions that extend their application in many circumstances.

Vaucluse House, Australia's first house museum, was explicitly modelled on the principles of civil and domestic religion as expressed at America's early Great Man house museums. Though translated to museum status by accident, Vaucluse House was from the outset managed as a shrine to the great man, William Charles Wentworth, recognized principally for his contribution to constitutional government in NSW. But the transfer of American-style, patriotic, civil religion was never as convincing as the original. Australia's status as a colony, and later a subject state of Britain, confined the religious dimensions of hero worship. Though Vaucluse House's trustees persevered in their efforts to elevate Wentworth to national hero, he never inspired the kind of cult-status enjoyed by George Washington, and thus the Great Man house museum model never really took hold. That said the great man spirit motivated at least one other Australian house museum creator, Russell Grimwade, who shipped Captain James Cook's cottage from England to Australia; his endeavour was premised on the rhetoric and principles of civil religion.

While Australia's fledgling house museum movement was struggling to survive, preservation in the United States continued to dominate the cultural sector. From this direction grew what we now think of as the heritage industry. Principal players were William Sumner Appleton and his organization the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) and J.D. Rockefeller, Jr. who financed the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg. The history of these influential

heritage organizations is not covered in this thesis, though I provide a list of comprehensive sources for those wishing to follow-up this area of interest. (Chapter 5) Instead I observe how their philosophies came to influence fellow practitioners and what impact their management techniques and conservation practice had upon house museums and heritage. This analysis extends to parallel developments in Australia. The predominant focus on fabric of these new heritage professionals – architects, conservators, and archaeologists – had two outcomes. It led to the creation and growth of the Architectural house museum genre, and it encouraged a new, professional standard of museum practice at existing Great Man house museums.

Social history, the historical approach that challenged the biographical, monumental view of history through the study of ordinary people's lives and experiences, was to present the next challenge to the Great Man house museum paradigm. Though the ideals of social history had been adopted at settler-pioneer museums from the mid twentieth-century (Chapter 5), other museum types, especially house museums, were slow to respond to directions forged by social history. I believe the Lower East Side Tenement Museum (LESTM) in New York, created in 1988, is the first house museum in the United States created deliberately in response to the social history paradigm. Recently, the American Labor Museum, Botto House National Landmark in Haledon, NJ, was brought to my attention as a possible example of a Social History house museum. Opened in 1983, it could well replace the LESTM as 'the first', but as I have not visited the museum I am unable to verify this. The fact that both these museums date from the 1980s shows that it was some time before the influence of social history was noticed by the house museum movement.

In Australia, the progress of social history within museums was similar. Susannah Place Museum in Sydney, opened as a Social History house museum in 1993, was consciously rescued and preserved to represent the lives of working-class people. There are other examples of this new genre dating from a similar time, notably Meroogal, a museum of women's domestic history, and Calthorpe's house, which provides a picture of middle-class living in the early twentieth-century.

While the social history paradigm was encouraging the creation of a new category of house museum, existing Great Man house museums were busy adopting some of its characteristics. However, these museums never lost their hero worship fundamentals. In fact, I posit that the idea of hero worship was transferred fairly uncritically to the new genre. Social History creators proposed that our shared ancestors were also national heroes. Though the social history approach informs conservation and interpretation at this new house museum type, I believe interpretation, professional and popular publications, and education programs, support my claim that the perspective of worship continues.

This exploration of the genesis and inter-relationship of two categories of house museum, Great Man and Social History, is demonstrated through four detailed biographical case studies drawn from the archives of each subject: Vaucluse House, Monticello, Lower East Side Tenement Museum, and Susannah Place Museum. Though my sample is small, extraordinarily rich records coupled with complementary professional analysis has given me insight into more than just the life histories of my studies. The findings demonstrate a relationship that applies at hundreds of house museums in the United States and Australia.

### **Case Study Selection**

The life histories of four house museums – Vaucluse House in Sydney; Monticello in Charlottesville; the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City; and Susannah Place Museum in Sydney – provide the foundation upon which my thesis develops. It is important to declare how and why I chose these house museums from the thousands of possible alternatives. Each museum was selected after the completion of the preceding case study. Tangential findings pointed me in the direction of suitable, comparable examples.

There was however an obvious starting point. As a researcher based in Australia I knew a study of Australian house museums had to begin with the first house translated to museum status; this is Vaucluse House in Sydney which opened its doors to visitors in 1912. It transpired that Vaucluse House was a prime example of a Great Man house museum: the early Trustees promoted its principal

occupant, William Charles Wentworth, as an Australian hero. From the extensive archives, to which the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales (HHT) allowed me unlimited access, I was able to confirm that Vacluse House was modelled on the Mount Vernon-Great Man style of house museum. Australia's geographical isolation, deemed a deterrent to the growth of museums and galleries by Markham and Richards in 1933, did not negatively impact on museum activity at Vacluse House. Its administrators were conversant with international house museum rhetoric and trends.

The references to Mount Vernon, and the overtly patriotic narratives espoused by Vacluse House's Trustees, sent me off to read up on this germinal Great Man house museum. I discovered a wealth of literature exploring Mount Vernon's translation to house museum status, the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, and its originator Ann Pamela Cunningham. (Alexander 1983; Coleman 1933; Handlin 1979; Hosmer 1963, 1965; Marling 1988; Schwartz 1967; Schwartz 1987; Wallace 1986; West 1999; et al) Brief forays into American-studies literature confirmed that the transformation of Hasbrouck House and Mount Vernon to house museum status was hugely significant. These houses were more than house museums. They were symbols of a new age, a new America. I knew I had to go and see them for myself if I was to understand the model that inspired Vacluse House's Trustees.

Thanks to Lois McNeil and the Winterthur Museum, I was able to spend eight months in the United States, visiting countless house museums and immersing myself in American-history literature. I was soon formulating a typology of house museums in my mind. Collector's houses, Biographical house museums and Architectural house museums were much in evidence, but by far the dominant genre was the Great Man.

In order to comprehend Australia's adoption of the model at Vacluse House, I felt a comparative study of a Great Man house museum in the United States was needed. Two factors influenced my choice of study: it had to have been the home of a truly significant great man, and it had to have been a museum for a comparable length of time as Vacluse House. Mount Vernon was an obvious



candidate, but as it has already been the subject of many extensive studies, I felt another contribution to the literature was unnecessary. I therefore chose Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello, in Charlottesville, Virginia. Monticello has been the subject of some academic discourse; Thomas Jefferson is recognizably one of America's Founding Fathers; and it has been a museum since the second decade of the twentieth century.

I was incredibly lucky in my selection. Once again the archives were extensive and thanks to the generosity of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation (TJMF) and the staff of the Alderman Library at the University of Virginia I was granted unlimited access. From the wealth of resources I was able to piece together a rich bibliography of Monticello, and chart developments in the broader house museum and historic site sector. Better yet, the evolution of interpretive narratives, conservation practice and museography at Monticello paralleled those at Vacluse House.

What the two Great Man case studies illustrate nicely is that house museums do not evolve in isolation. Collaboration between house museum and historic site professionals has seen developments pioneered in one environment adopted at the other. The evolution of museum and conservation practice at Vacluse House and Monticello reflected developments occurring in the wider heritage sector. To consider the context of such developments I undertook a survey of factors that impacted significantly upon the development of house museums. One of the discoveries of this survey was that changing historiographical paradigms have influenced the development and evolution of house museums in both the United States and Australia: the most recent and significant changes occurring in response to the demands of social history.

The social history call for representative histories has raised the profile of once subordinate house occupants. The life histories of ordinary people who lived alongside great men are being researched and incorporated into established narratives in order to provide a more rounded image of life at these great houses. Vacluse House and Monticello are testament to this new holistic focus. This

approach has raised the actions of our ordinary ancestors to the same plane as those of great men.

I suggest the urge to acknowledge the contributions our ancestors made to society has manifested itself in a new house museum genre, the Social History house museum. I came to this conclusion whilst still exploring house museums in the United States, reading American-studies literature, and discussing the genre with colleagues at Winterthur. In one such discussion the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City was mentioned. Intrigued, I contacted the curator, made an appointment to take a tour, and my intuition that ancestor worship was now an acceptable rationale for house museums was confirmed. The archives at the LESTM are not as extensive as those at Vacluse House or Monticello; in fact I felt they had been somewhat edited. Still, I was given free access to those records that exist and was able to uncover a fascinating history of this significant example of the Social History genre.

On my return to Australia a comparable Social History house museum had to be found to neatly tie-up what had become a comparative study. Three candidates immediately sprung to mind: Calthorpe's House in Canberra; Meroogal in Nowra, NSW; and Susannah Place Museum in Sydney. I concluded that Susannah Place Museum would be the most appropriate. I was influenced by previous visits, and my knowledge that this museum comprised four independent houses, complementing the apartment structure of a New York tenement building. The possibilities of drawing comparisons between immigrant and working-class communities also influenced my decision. As Susannah Place Museum is administered by the HHT, I knew that the records would be complete and accessible, which they were. Again my choice was fortunate, for I have been able to identify similarities between the LESTM and Susannah Place Museum, and once again uncover parallel external cultural determinants.

The ultimate selection of case studies has provided a neat picture of the evolution of Great Man house museums. But I acknowledge that there are many other house museums that I could have studied, both in the Great Man and Social History categories, and in comparable house museum types like Biographical house

museums, Collector's houses, and Architectural house museums. I did in fact undertake extensive research for a further five house museums, which informed the outcomes of my thesis, my typology of house museums, and my final choice of case studies. These were: the W. R. Johnston Collection in Melbourne, Rose Seidler House in Sydney, and Blundell's Cottage in Canberra; Henry Francis Du Pont's Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library in Delaware, and Fallingwater in Pennsylvania.

Even with the knowledge that my outcomes are informed by more than the four case studies presented, it is obvious that absent from my research are houses managed by agencies like the National Trusts in Australia, the SPNEA and National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) in the United States and historical societies. These and other similar heritage organizations are custodians of hundreds of properties, some of which are associated with great men, famous artists, or significant architects. Many of the houses in the care of such organizations are also associated with anonymous ancestors rather than the identifiable great figure. Today the majority of house museums managed by volunteer societies, historical societies, and specialist heritage organizations have adopted the cause of social history. All house museums that offer guided tours tell the tale of their house through the people that lived there, recounting anecdotes, making links between the architecture, furnishings, display and the families who once occupied the properties. I believe that such interpretive approaches inadvertently mask the fact that these houses were originally translated to museum status for aesthetic or architectural criteria. No matter how socially responsible interpretive narratives have become, they do not negate the importance of the fabric to the museum's rationale.

An outcome of my initial investigations into Vacluse House, Great Man house museums, civil religion, et al, was that British and European house museums disappeared from my focus. Although not researched in depth, I have over the years visited many Stately Homes administered by English Heritage and the National Trust, and explored a number of *châteaux* in France. I am also intimately familiar with the Sir John Soane's Museum and the Wallace Collection in

London, two early examples of Collector's houses. Recollections of past experiences indirectly informed my current understanding of house museum typology, and reaffirmed my belief that the Great Man house museum as created in the United States and adopted in Australia is unique to the New World situation.

I would like to finally stress that this thesis is not a survey of house museums in Australia or the United States. I chose to take Australia's oldest house museum, Vaucluse House, as a starting point for discussion about a specific museum type. Happenstance took me to the United States and away from Britain and Europe. The thesis grew organically as readings and case studies sent me off into new, often un-thought of directions. Of course, this thesis provides only a snapshot of the house museum field. There are many other house museums that I would love to study with the same detail afforded my four case studies. I imagine in some instances similar findings will be made, other cases may send me into yet more uncharted territory. Architectural house museums warrant further detailed attention. It would be fascinating to trace the creation of this genre and its recent adoption-of-history. Also of immense interest are Collectors' houses, a genre small in Australia with only a couple of examples – the W. R. Johnston Collection in Melbourne and Clyde Bank in Sydney – but one that is incredibly popular in the United States – the Frick Collection in New York City, NY; Henry Francis du Pont's Winterthur Museum in Wilmington, DE; the Isabella Stewart Gardiner Museum in Boston, MA; Ima Hogg's Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens in Houston, TX; et al– and owes its origins to English and European collections – the myriad of Stately Homes in Britain and European Estates, and the Sir John Soane's Museum and Wallace Collection in London.

The unstructured methodological approach has become a fairly linear study, which is laid out over the next eight chapters. Following in this chapter, I introduce readers to the small body of literature devoted to house museums, considering it in relation to generic museum-studies literature. Definitions and house museum categories are also presented to provide a museological framework to the thesis.

Chapter 2, Creation of the Genre, examines the motives behind the creation and development of Great Man house museums in the United States in the mid nineteenth-century. In particular the concepts of civil religion, patriotic pilgrimage, hero worship and domestic religion – the genre’s underlying principles – are explored. The model created in the United States is then compared to that adopted in early twentieth-century Australia; issues concerning the relevance of civil religion, pilgrimage and hero worship in an Australian context are addressed in response. Chapters 3 & 4 are the biographical studies of Vaucluse House and Monticello.

In Chapter 5, Evolution of a House Museum Genre, cultural, social and historical changes that have had a direct impact upon the evolution of house museums are identified. I trace the early life of the house museum movement in the United States and Australia; the development of preservation and heritage societies in both nations; changing historiography, particularly the impact the social history paradigm has had on the Great Man house museum movement; and developments in conservation practice and house museography. I also address the changing nature of heroes selected for veneration in the traditional format. Chapters 6 & 7 support the analysis presented in Chapter 5 with case studies of two Social History house museums: the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and Susannah Place Museum.

In Chapter 8, after providing my new typology of house museums, I present a summary of my findings and address some unusual yet frequent discrepancies that have emerged from my research. My concluding thoughts are occupied with future research directions, for I still believe there is much to learn from the house museum oeuvre.

### **House Museums: Museography and Museology; the State of the Literature**

Laurence Vail Coleman published the first comprehensive study of house museums in 1933. He was responsible for coining the phrase ‘Historic House Museum’, the book using this expression for its title. Coleman’s work examines

house museums from a museological and museographical perspective. Management, interpretation and education issues are addressed with reference to specific house museums; a comprehensive list of every house museum in the United States, with brief biographical information for each site, is provided in the appendix. Coleman, at the time Director of the American Association of Museums (AAM), afforded the house museum credibility by devoting such professional and scholarly attention to its development and history, and added to museological research in general. It was not until six decades later that the house museum received more rigorous attention.

In the intervening years a few articles were written that addressed definitional problems and house museography. Seale's 1979 book *Recreating the Historic House Interior* and Butcher-Youngmans' 1993 text *Historic House Museums: A Practical Handbook for their Care, Preservation, and Management* were the first publications after Coleman's to specifically address house museography; i.e. the practical aspects of house museum management. Butcher-Youngmans' text also addressed the impact America's socio-cultural environment had upon the genre's development.

Seale's and Butcher-Youngmans' texts are significant contributions to house museography, the practical aspects of museum work that are specific to house museums. While neither author identifies their study in such terms, their contribution to house museography has to be noted. For Seale and Butcher-Youngmans infer that the unique form and function of house museums determines specialized management practices. House museography is more tightly focused and peculiarly constrained than general museography. Issues that affect general museum management – collecting, conservation, exhibition, interpretation, and education – have to be reconsidered for the house museum context. It is the house's scale and domestic nature that determines house museography. Collection management and conservation are intimately linked, as there is little scope for rotating exhibits, and stresses – visitors, humidity and light – placed on the moveable and structural components of the house are great. Interpretation narratives and education programs are also determined by the physicality of the

house and its previous occupants. By addressing such issues in these house museum manuals, Seale and Butcher-Youngmans have contributed to the professional development of house museum management and thus indirectly to our understanding of house museography.

Patricia West's *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (1999) is the most comprehensive museological research in the field of house museums since Coleman. West analyzes the political atmosphere surrounding the establishment of four house museums in the United States: Mount Vernon and the unification of north and south; Orchard House and gender politics; Monticello and Americanizing foreigners; and Booker T. Washington National Monument and race politics.

For a museum type that has dominated the American stock of heritage resources for over 150-years, and has profoundly influenced other nations' preservation efforts, it is striking that so few museum professionals have chosen to examine house museums.

This limited critical study of house museums reflects a similar situation within the wider museum arena. Eileen Hooper-Greenhill identifies the dearth of museological study though she is part of a growing number of museum professionals from both academic and practical perspectives who have begun to address this imbalance since the mid-1980s. (Bennett 1995; Butcher-Youngmans 1991, 1993; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Home 1984; Kavanagh 1990, 1993; Orosz 1990; Pearce 1986, 1992, 1995; Stam 1993; Vergo 1989; et al) Once the generic museum field started to receive critical attention, the way was clear for more specific genres to be scrutinized. Given the relatively recent academic attention afforded museums, researchers working at specific museum types, like house museums, must develop research programs and position their museums in the new museology. West (1999) started the critical analysis of house museums in this mould. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has also responded to the challenge, forming DemHist (*Demeures Historiques*) in 1999, an international committee specifically concerned with house museums. DemHist is currently undertaking a methodological study focusing on the classification of the different

types of house museum. This international attention to the house museum is important, for it gives the genre a significant place in the museological oeuvre. If we are ever to understand the underlying principle of the movement, then this research must be ongoing and responsive to changing historical and museological scholarship.

Hooper-Greenhill, assessing museum analysis to date, identifies two streams of focus that have dominated museum writers' attention: the 'all encompassing "encyclopedic" account that attempts to produce chronological, incremental descriptions of the "development" of museum[s] ... [and] narratives concerning either a single individual as collector ... or focusing on the history of single institutions.' (1992, 20) I would add a third stream to this model: manuals written for museum workers or those wishing to establish a museum, which are supported by historical developments of the genre. These three streams provide an overview of the museum profession; their content is generally descriptive and/or prescriptive. Critical analysis is absent, and as Hooper-Greenhill notes, 'lack of examination and interrogation of the professional, cultural, and ideological practices of museums has meant both a failure to examine the basic underlying principles on which current museum and gallery practices rest, and a failure to construct a critical history of the museum field.' (1992, 3) The rationale of museums is the construction and dissemination of knowledge: the 'most positive purpose of the museum ... is to stimulate curiosity, ... to rouse a hunger for knowledge and to give guidance about how it can be satisfied.' (Finlay 1977, 41) Museums are not passive institutions; they reflect cultural environments and can be manipulated to influence the same. We therefore need to ask questions about how and why museums are constructed? Museums, as products of their society, deserve critical analysis regarding their creation, development and influence during their histories, to enable the construction of a critical history of the museum as a socio-cultural institution.

Hooper-Greenhill's text explores the museum field in general, though the tenor of her argument has even greater resonance for specific museum genres. For if the broader discipline is yet to be comprehensively studied, then the specialist



institutions lag even further behind, as evidenced by the little research devoted to house museums to date. The broad-scale study of museums allows us to explore societal relationships. Targeted examination of specific museum genres allows us to concentrate our focus on structurally distinct formats. Specific museum types provide a microcosm in which to explore the broader issues that affect small and large, general and specific, institutions alike.

In 1989, Vergo coined the phrase 'New Museology' (Vergo 1989). Essentially, new museology is the way museums have adopted the social history paradigm into their philosophy and planning. As Stam perceives the situation, 'New Museology rhetoric lies in the high proportion of attention given to the relationships of the museum to its social, economic and political environment as part of the analysis of pertinence, relevance and meaning.' (1993, 268) I observe that the social, cultural and political influences evident in the house museum movement are reflective of like influences in the wider museum field. Ultimately, I posit that as a medium for analysis the house museum enables exploration of the persistence of worship in contemporary museums, thus demonstrating that the values of our culture remain traditionally prescriptive; they are not as revolutionarily different as we like to think. The Social History house museum model created in response to changing historical perspective is still firmly influenced by the principles of the Great Man model. Far from being revolutionary, it too is prescriptive in nature; its message is similar to early house museums, but diffused through a twentieth-century, social history-tinted filter.

Great Man and Social History house museums fit into the broader category of history museum. As such, evaluation of their presentation, interpretation and educational facilities should be carried out according to museological practice. If we accept the validity of social history-determined, academic history, and its permutations within the museum field, then we accept that history museums are museums that 'exist to record and interpret ways of living and working through evidence derived from objects, oral testimony, music and sounds. The history museum can trace the configurations of cultural definition and social change and reveal its understanding of these to a wide audience in ways that promote

discussion and awareness.’ (Kavanagh 1990, xii-xiv) As we will see in Chapters 6 and 7, this is very much the philosophy of the creators of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City and Susannah Place Museum in Sydney.

When analyzing the impact social history has had upon interpretation, presentation and education at the traditional Great Man or the new Social History house museum, we draw upon contemporary expectations. Consideration of this influence needs to be acknowledged in analysis of the early house museum models, specifically what we refer to now as the original Great Man genre, for the historicity of the creation period is far removed from that of the late twentieth-century. As I will show, early house museum creators emphasized the historical significance of their sites, highlighting historical events, figures and narratives; but limited research, subjective objectives, and unrepresentative samples, have meant these events, figures and narratives lost their credibility by the late twentieth-century. But the histories as presented at early house museums are no less relevant than those interpreted today. For they provide us with physical and documented expressions of the social, cultural and political conditions at the time of each house museum’s creation. Understanding the evolving presentation and interpretation within the house museum thus allows us to follow the evolution of these cultural trends. As Kavanagh succinctly states, history museums ‘are created using current mind-maps and express dominant ideologies, in essence our beliefs about ourselves and the world. As a result, they reveal the traditions of history-telling that are prioritized in contemporary life.’ (1990, 5)

Evolving historiography, museology and museography have encouraged house museums to become professionally more responsible over the course of their 150-year history. This professionalism has allowed house museums to assume the respectable authority of history museums. There was a time when the public generally accepted the idea that ‘if it was in the museum, it was not only real but represented a standard of excellence.’ (Cameron 1971, 17) This situation is challenged today. Kavanagh shows that history museums remain ‘part of a set of official apparatus that people use to find information. Histories in museums have automatic credibility as a result. This equips museums with considerable power

and influence on how the past should be remembered and understood. Where, for example, museum histories discriminate and omit, they further legitimize discrimination and omission. Where they commemorate and celebrate, they permit commemoration and celebration. Where they question and consider, they promote questioning and consideration.' (Kavanagh 1990, 127) As the public grows more aware of the social parameters of museum construction, responsible house museums must address the historical accuracy of their presentations, for despite growing public skepticism, there is still a public tendency to believe in the historical authority of history museum presentations.

Narratives presented at house museums have been accepted by the public as faithful accounts, and until recently went unchallenged. House museum narratives are mostly situated within reality, but a lack of rigorous scholarship at the earliest house museums, combined with a patriotically inspired, pedagogical purpose, has meant that many have taken on mythic character. It is hard to challenge such accounts, even when scholarship, responding to contemporary museum practice, tells us we should. A growing professional awareness of the construction of house museum narratives has meant that the authoritative mantle such institutions assume is now contested. However, narratives presented at some house museums are proving more difficult to amend in response to new scholarship, so ingrained are they in public consciousness. At such sites, we see the historical accuracy of physical and structural changes emphasized. So too, informed, research-based interpretation and education is highlighted. A cynic could argue that this focus upon accuracy of presentation and interpretation is a means to counter criticism surrounding archaic narratives. This response to the demands of social history-determined management practice is too simplistic. Hard though it may be, the mythical narratives that persist at the long-established Great Man house museums must be acknowledged; their construction should be understood and perhaps incorporated into the established story.

### **Defining and Categorizing the Genre**

I use the term 'house museum' to refer to the focus of my study, though this museum type is also commonly known as the 'historic house'. The term 'historic house' dominates research writings, though I feel it is inappropriate as house museums receive increasing museological attention. Historic house limits the perception of houses suitable for museum conversion; it ties the type of house considered for museum application to notable historical associations or events; it implies a required age/history thus making the acquisition of contemporary houses difficult to defend; and it places the identified historic houses apart from the landscapes in which they reside. (Lewis 1987, 25) House museum is a more explicit term. It allows houses to be included that may not conform to the historical association criteria; it considers contemporary houses which may be identified for their architectural merit alone; and it allows houses to be interpreted within the context of their environment. The use of historic house obscures definitions of such museums; its adoption is widespread despite little critical discussion of what the term means. To date there is no commonly agreed definition of house museum or historic house.

The first house museums in the United States and Australia were sites that venerated the lives of great men; hence the terminology Great Man for this genre. This rationale for house museums dominates the movement today, and as evidenced by the article "Shrine to Suffragists" (Chapter 2), is still considered a viable focus, though the notion of the great man has widened to include women. Within the traditional Great Man genre, there has been a restructuring of national heroes. As I will demonstrate in Chapters 3 and 4, the presentations of William Charles Wentworth and Thomas Jefferson have evolved over the past seven decades in answer to the demands of social history and new standards of professional house museum practice.

In response to the social history paradigm, the traditional Great Man genre has spawned an offshoot: the Social History house museum. The links to the original Great Man genre may not be immediately apparent, but as I will show in Chapters 6 and 7, case studies of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and Susannah

Place Museum, the focus of interpretation is upon a new type of hero: the ordinary people of history from whom most of us descend. The vernacular architecture of the sites alone tells us little about living conditions and other social issues, so at both these museums, documented research has been undertaken to create interpretive narratives. Families have been identified, and their life histories are explored. These families are said to represent our common ancestors.

The Great Man genre and the Social History variant dominate the house museum movement. But they are not the only categories of house museum: as we will see, a handful of writers have grappled with the identification and definition of these and other forms over the course of the twentieth century.

Laurence Vail Coleman reflected in a letter to the historian of American preservation Charles Hosmer in 1965: ‘As you know the concept of the house as an institution was new and not generally grasped in 1932, and however obvious the name “historic house museum” may now seem, I had to coin it to take the place of expressions such as “places like Mount Vernon, old houses open to the public, historical shrines, et al.”’ (Hosmer 1981, 894) Considering the term in this context, we can see how ‘historical’ came to be attached to the genre. For in 1932, when the house museum movement was undergoing professionalization, the type of house dominating preservation activities was expected to represent an architectural period, or represent a person or period in history that pre-dated the American Civil War.

Where celebrity is born, where fame makes its home, where art or science labors in erstwhile obscurity, where important incidents occurred, where death visits the Great - such, for the most part, are the places chosen to survive. (Coleman 1933, 17)

Coleman offers no definition for the house museum, but analysis of his text shows that he believed preservation of suitable houses should be determined by the house’s association with great men or events, or its structure and manufacture. Coleman also expects houses to be of a certain age – pre-industrial – before they can be considered worthy of preservation, or as suitable arenas for education. The

term historic is thus associated with a bygone era. There is an undercurrent of nostalgia present in Coleman's understanding of house museums too: 'about 1835 a profound change set in with the advent of machinery. During the decades that followed the people became mired in industrialism, and, scrambling to speculate and exploit, they forgot to preserve the traditional amenities of life. ... A swelling stream of aliens added to the social illness and further depressed the standards of the people.' (1933, 15) Coleman's nostalgic interpretation of mid nineteenth-century society is informed by a colonial revivalism inspired by domestic religion. (Chapter 2) Like his nineteenth-century, house museum predecessors, Coleman believed houses, and therefore house museums, could have a moralizing, Americanizing influence upon the new immigrants. Coleman attributed the declining standards of building, people and expectations to industrialization and advocated preserving anything old/historic still extant. 'It does not matter if in some cases the saving reasons seem to be trivial; as years pass, each structure that remains is sure to come into its richest meaning. If associations are sacred, time will not fail to give them reverence; if they are of the moment only, time will blend them into its mosaic.' (1933, 17)

After Coleman coined the phrase 'historic house museum', it became the accepted label for the museum type. Since 1933 a few museum writers and professionals have addressed our understanding of the term, refining definitions. Charles Montgomery, curator, collector and connoisseur, in his article "The Historic House - a definition" (1959) challenged the aptness of the term 'historic', noting possible ambiguities: 'Is a house historic merely because it has existed long enough to be considered old? Or is it historic in the sense that it throws dependable light on some phase of past history?' (12)

For Montgomery, a house of age that allows us to 'document ... an earlier way of life' is historic. (1959, 13) The variety of ways such houses document life is how he identifies his museum categories: Biographical House; the house that is a shrine to a moment in history or Moment Shrine; the Era House, and the Area House. (13) While these categories are not concise enough to be useful in my

analysis of house museums Montgomery's influence on defining the field has been immeasurable.

Montgomery's Biographical House and Moment Shrine are essentially the same thing. The only difference is the Biographical House still contains furnishings and ephemera of the occupant. Montgomery's example of a Biographical House is Theodore Roosevelt's home, Sagamore Hill, Long Island. Since the adoption of social history at house museums, there has been a move to purchase family homes that contain the furnishings of current and previous generations (Meroogal, NSW; Rouse Hill House, NSW; Calthorpe's House, ACT; Rundlet-May House, NH; Codman House, MA; Marrett House, ME), but at the time Montgomery was writing, and following his example, Biographical Houses were concerned with the life history of notable individuals. Likewise, a Moment Shrine was a house that belonged to someone of great importance, a site where this individual 'was born or died, or in which some great event in history occurred.' (Montgomery 1959, 13) On face value, Montgomery's use of the term shrine would appear to reflect my thesis that traditional Great Man house museums are pilgrimage sites where the veneration of our heroes takes place. However, Montgomery's use of the term is one of analogy, rather than actuality. Nonetheless this terminology entered the vocabulary of American house museums, and by the late 1950s words like shrine, monument and Mecca had become common parlance. This lexicon of sacred terminology persists today.

Montgomery's third category, the Era House, is awkward. The Era House is very similar to what I name Collector's House. Montgomery states that 'collectively [Era Houses] ... not only provide a kind of biographical sketch of the art-collecting activities of their owners, but accurately portray a segment of life and history, especially when left as they were lived in.' (1959, 14) I would generally agree with this. If we look at Winterthur, for instance, the museum at which Montgomery was working at the time, then a study of Henry Francis du Pont's collecting rationale, influenced so much by the American, early twentieth-century fashion for Colonial Revival, can reveal much about du Pont's relationship to cultural trends, and if examined in context, the socio-cultural environment that

encouraged such a fashion. But Winterthur is no longer a home decorated in the Colonial Revival style as perceived by du Pont. The impact of connoisseurship and social history scholarship has, over its 50-year history as a museum, defused du Pont's original intent. Montgomery's concept of the Era House is perhaps too idealistic, for it is unlikely that a house's collection and interpretation can ever be frozen at a particular point in history.

Montgomery's final category, the Area House, straddles the Social History genre and the SPNEA (Chapter 5) rationale for house museums. It also has precedents in open air villages like Skansen in Sweden, and Old Sturbridge Village and Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts. The Area House offers 'an account of the architecture, furnishings, and way of life of a particular region. ... their over-all importance is as historical evidence of the culture of a specific area of our country.' (1959, 14) Such houses are of importance for their design qualities, and for their relationship to specific sites or areas.

Aside from the four categories highlighted above, Montgomery refers to 'a related, but different, category' (1959, 14) which I note with interest, for he refers to this type as a house museum (the above four categories relate specifically to historic houses). For Montgomery, a house museum refers to a house where a non-related collection is displayed, or a house presented as a memorial to an individual who once resided there. Montgomery uses a memorial to an author as his example. Here the home of the author is used 'as the setting for displays of various editions of his works and of the prints, paintings, etc, which memorialize his life, but which never actually were in his house or possession.' (1959, 14) In this scenario the house becomes merely a gallery space.

Montgomery sums up the distinction between historic house and house museums thus:

If we define an historic house as one in which the structure and its furnishings constitute an authentic unity in terms of any one of the four categories listed above, we are led to the conclusion that this hypothetical



author's home has been transformed into a house museum and is not by definition an historic house. (1959, 14)

This is the crux of the problem with Montgomery's definitions. For according to his thesis, the houses used for the final, related category were the homes of now-memorialized people. There is, therefore, an association that links the house's history to the occupant. And in the Biographical House, Moment Shrine, and even the Era House, Montgomery would agree that the historical associations of the people or events and their homes are what make these houses worth preserving and popular to visitors. Further, by referring to the latter type as museums, and highlighting the distinction between these and historic houses, Montgomery ignores the museum role that historic houses play. For *all* the categories he identifies are museums. They all present a past reality; they have all, to some extent, been recreated or reinterpreted.

Montgomery's schemata enable us to comprehend the cultural environment that created such a point of view. His distinction between house museums and historic houses shows that historic-house museums in 1950's America were still considered shrines and therefore sites of worship. Even the Era House with its focus on the collection is important because of the collector. Thus it is the *numen*<sup>1</sup> of the occupant that gives an historic house value; the contents contribute to the site's spirituality. The inclusion of Area House in Montgomery's definition identifies the settler-pioneer precursor to Social History house museums. (Chapter 5) Montgomery notes the value of studying vernacular architecture and complementary furnishings to gain 'historical evidence of the culture of a specific area'. However the Area House focuses upon the built structure rather than people, so is more closely aligned to the aesthetic stream of house museums.

Montgomery stresses that historic houses provide important material evidence for the study of past lives. However according to Montgomery's definitions, the

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<sup>1</sup> A Roman pagan term for a spirit 'that calls forth in many of us awe and reverence.' (Maines 1993, 9)

dominant rationale for historic houses in 1950's America is the provision of 'authentic' domestic environments that demonstrate lifestyles of America's creators, be they Presidents, writers, wealthy collectors or architects. If you remove the domestic element and diffuse the *numen* of the historic house, the site becomes a mere museum.

Butcher-Youngmans (1991, 1993) was the next museum professional to address historic houses in detail. She writes:

... we normally save historic sites from the ravages of time (or demolition crews) because of their association with the elite, famous, and "notable" of society; their location on spots where "great things" took place; their noteworthy architectural styles; or the fact that they simply are the oldest standing structures. Of high priority are homes of the Founding Fathers and high-style estates belonging to the wealthy. But most of these sites reflect the lives of the dominant culture. The result is a lopsided, unrealistic view of the past that has left many people ignored. (Butcher-Youngmans 1991, 57)

This assessment of historic sites identifies Butcher-Youngmans' contemporary, social history-grounded attitude. Her call for more representative sites reflects a late twentieth-century approach to heritage preservation. In order to balance the lopsided nature of preservation, Butcher-Youngmans advocates saving 'homes from the second half of this century, while they still are obtainable in their original forms and before they are changed into something unrecognizable (or lost altogether).' (1991, 58) How to assess what type of houses to preserve is not addressed by Butcher-Youngmans but her argument is indicative of those working in the late twentieth-century who appreciate the value of the here-and-now, and acknowledge the benefit that recording the perspective of contemporary residents will have upon future interpretations.

Butcher-Youngmans (1993) adopts Alderson's and Low's 1976 historic site categories, interpreting them specifically for house museums. Alderson and Low identified three categories: the Documentary Site, the Representative Site and the

Aesthetic Site. Both Alderson and Low and Butcher-Youngmans stress that distinction between categories is not rigid: there is often overlap as evidenced at Monticello in Charlottesville (Great Man with Architectural) or Elizabeth Bay House in Sydney (Architectural with Great Man). But it is important to identify the principal significance of the site to determine the most relevant category, in order to ensure the most responsible interpretation. Both Alderson's and Low's (1976) and Butcher-Youngmans' (1993) texts are manuals for museum practitioners, and the underlying premise of both books is grounded in a museography informed by social history.

The Documentary Historic House as perceived by Butcher-Youngmans is in essence a term for the Great Man genre, in which 'the primary interpretive aim is to chronicle the life of an individual or relate an important historical event.' (Butcher-Youngmans 1993, 185) The individuals are of course rich and/or famous. In Butcher-Youngmans' second category, the Representative Historic House, we see a variation of my Social History genre: a museum where the 'focus is on the way of life rather than on a particular individual or family.' (1993, 185) Such house museums certainly exist, and have become prevalent in the last few decades thanks to the more representative approach encouraged by the social history perspective. But in all such house museums I have visited or read about, a family or individual is conjured up, for it is impossible to tell the story of a house without characters.

Butcher-Youngmans' final category, the Aesthetic Historic House, is a house where the primary focus is on a collection, whether it be art, furniture or antiques. The house serves as a backdrop to the collection. In such house museums, an understanding of the collector is important to the reading of the collection. This type of house museum exists in the United States in plentiful supply. Such museums, that I term Collector's Houses, are a genre quite distinct from the Great Man, both in intent and their evolving presentation.

Collector's Houses require a brief mention, for at the time of their translation to museum status it was the character of the collector that determined their existence and presentation. At many Collector's Houses today, the collector has been

superceded by his collection as connoisseurship infiltrates interpretation. Collector's Houses more often than not take on the name of their founding collector, ensuring that although the individual's presence may have faded, their attachment to the house and collection continues. The nature of collecting has received much recent analysis by museologists, Carol Duncan and Susan Pearce writing the most relevant critiques to date. (Duncan 1995, Pearce 1992)

Duncan's concept of the Donor Memorial closely resembles my category Collector's House. Donor Memorial encompasses museums built to house a collection, and collections that remain in the collector's residence. Duncan argues that the donated collection dominates a domestic setting, thus overshadowing the life of the collector. The collectors become the focus of admiration for their wealth, their accumulation of 'fine' art, and the donation of their inheritance to the nation. How they accumulated their fortunes, lived their lives, related to contemporary society is usually ignored. (Duncan, C 1995, 72-77)

Duncan's study is focused upon Donor Memorials in the United States. She notes that the model followed by early twentieth-century American collectors was strongly akin to similar collections in the UK; she specifically identifies the Wallace Collection at Hertford House in London. Duncan suggests that 'Hertford House's central theme, the demonstration of aristocratic refinement, was not missed by Frick, Morgan, or the other American millionaires who saw it.' (1995, 74) This central theme became the premise for Collector's Houses in the United States, Britain and Europe at the turn of the twentieth century; the creation of ancestral grandeur through the conversion of financial capital to cultural capital.

The museologist Susan Pearce shows that collections accumulated by individuals during their lifetime generate a measure of immortality. Such collections 'are the extended selves of their collectors, and with life goes immortality. Collections, being material, can outlive us, but through them we too can be turned into enduring things.' (Pearce 1992, 88) While Pearce considers these collections in established museums, as opposed to the house/site-specific examples Duncan writes about, there is no denying the similarities in intent and outcome. Pearce suggests collecting is 'essentially a European phenomenon, and has in the past

been largely limited to men.' (1992, 82) Men did create the majority of Collectors' Houses though there are some notable exceptions: Isabella Stuart Gardener, Ima Hogg, and Electra Havemeyer Webb to name a few in the United States. These collectors, men and women alike, represented a trend in the late nineteenth- early twentieth-century: the desire to collect culture. Aware of British and European aristocratic collections and the European-style Cabinets of Curiosities, these collectors drew upon such models to shape their own collecting habits and the museum type that was to become their own.

It is now time to present the findings of my museological study of house museums, so that my typology of the modern house museum movement can be laid out for readers.



Michael J. O'Connell for The New York Times  
In this house in Waterloo, N.Y., in 1848, five women organized the movement for women's rights in the United States.

## For Sale: Shrine to Suffragists

U.S. Covets House of Women's Rights Movement

Illustration 1: Headline News in 1999  
(The New York Times, "Metro" 14.11.1999)

### Chapter 2 Creation of a Genre

#### Introduction

"For Sale: Shrine to Suffragists". This headline led the front page of *The New York Times*' "Metro" on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1999. Under the full colour image of the 'shrine' (an 1829, Federal Style house), a brief biography of the principal actors and events in the United States Suffrage movement, sub-headed "From Parlor Tea to Social Revolution", was presented. The house, referred to by writer Glenn Collins as the Hunt House, in recognition of its late-1840s industrialist owner Richard P. Hunt, is on the market. And the asking price? Only \$139,900, a bargain if one considers the history of the site. For it was at this house 'on July 9, 1848, [that] Elizabeth Cady Stanton and four other women gathered in the parlor for tea

propertyless, voteless status, then found themselves spontaneously vowing to change it. When they left that day, it was to organize what is believed to have been the first women's rights convention, in Seneca Falls, only 10 days later.' (Collins 1999, 39)

The Seneca Falls Convention was the first national women's rights convention held in the United States, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton a leading voice in the women's suffrage movement. How important Mrs Hunt's tea party was in the fight for suffrage is uncertain. Doubt aside, historians, the National Park Service (NPS), and Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, are campaigning for the purchase of the house by federal government on the basis of these perceived historical associations.

At the time of going to press, the house was under threat of continuing private ownership. It has been in the current owner's family for 56 years, and now only the façade remains true to the 1840s period; 'the interior has been given a fully carpeted, suburban look.' (Collins 1999, 44) An offer to purchase the house has been made by a Mrs Church, who has a husband and eight children. She is quoted as saying, 'I would be honored to live in a house that has such historic value', and added 'that she and her husband would do what they could to restore the Hunt House.' (Collins 1999, 44) Of course such an outcome would mean no, or very limited, public access; 'thronges of visitors led by park rangers could not traipse through the house.' (Collins 1999, 44) And this is the crux of Glenn Collins' argument: Collins, Moynihan, Republican Representative Thomas M. Reynolds, and a number of concerned individuals believe that this house, with its perceived historical associations, belongs to the public. And as Collins accurately points out, the 'turmoil over the Hunt House sale is being played out at a time of growing interest in women's history.' (Collins 1999, 44)

There are some who might argue that attention to great women and their achievements marks a significant development in the house museum movement: i.e. broadening the prior focus on great men. I posit that this change in emphasis is cursory; it does not alter the reality of the situation as experienced at new and long established examples of the genre. Identifying a broader selection criterion simply

reflects a late twentieth-century cultural environment, represented by Collins' account of the Hunt House, in which previously disenfranchised groups demand equal recognition. In response to this demand we have seen a rise in the number of house museums in the Great Man genre established in the United States that focus on previously under-represented peoples, especially women and African-Americans. In Australia the tradition is little altered. The Great Man genre continues to be dominated by men. Women are more likely to be the focus of interpretation at Social History house museums, as are convicts, immigrants and labourers; indigenous people are not represented at all. We could infer from this that there were few great women, or (in)famous convicts, immigrants and labourers, in Australian history. The more likely interpretation is that these histories of 'others' now told at house museums were recognized only after the creation of Social History house museums. As speaker for all Australians, the Social History genre thus became the most appropriate medium in which to celebrate women's, convicts', workers' and immigrants' achievements. Thus the house museum movement in Australia has responded favourably to the challenges of the social history paradigm.

When we read an article like Collins', we have to ask why such a house should be preserved as a 'Shrine to Suffragists'? What is it that makes a house the most appropriate venue in which to examine the struggles of women and the suffrage movement? In fact, what makes any house a suitable venue in which to explore issues such as democratic government, patriotic ideals, suffrage, civil rights and religious tolerance? As this chapter will illustrate, the primary impetus for the preservation of early house museums in the United States was the rescue of such properties from decay or destruction so that they might become tools of the new civil religion. Houses identified for rescue all had historical links to great men, most commonly George Washington, in whose name no less than fourteen houses are preserved as public monuments. (Coleman 1933) Over a 150-year period, the selection of great men has grown, but the arguments advanced by preservationists are little changed from the nineteenth century. Neither is the language, with its emphasis on the sacred nature of these sites.



The social history paradigm has resulted in a more representative sample of great 'men'.<sup>2</sup> It has also seen the creation of house museums inspired specifically by the paradigm, houses like the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City, and Susannah Place Museum in Sydney. This new genre presents us with superficial changes that mask the lack of real evolution of the Great Man genre. For as I see it the Great Man model was, and still is, based on a premise of hero worship. The new Social History genre relies on a similar idea, translated into a more egalitarian form of ancestor worship. The heroes of our nation have expanded to encompass the heroes of the common person, our ancestors. So, though Social History house museums present themselves as models apart from the original genre, they are in fact part of a continuum.

### Civil Religion

#### Civil Religion in the United States

1850 marks the beginning of the house museum movement in the United States. This date, determined by the rescue of George Washington's revolutionary headquarters, Hasbrouck House, locates the social, cultural and political framework that encouraged the creation and continued growth of the new museum genre. (Hosmer 1965, Kammen 1993, West 1999)

By the mid nineteenth-century the new American Republic was in a state of flux. The few remaining Revolutionary-era heroes had died in the 1840s: John Quincy Adams in 1848 and Albert Gallatin in 1849. With the death of these heroes Americans became conscious that their past was slipping away from them. Combined with this growing sense of distance from the great people and events that created the new nation was increasing political and social unrest, which

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<sup>2</sup> Perhaps they should be referred to as great individuals, for women *are* represented in the genre. However the number of women and great men from minority groups is still overshadowed by the dominant great, white man.

culminated in the Civil War. As a result of these political convulsions, there was a wish by many to reaffirm the reputed unity of the early days of nationhood.

This reaffirmation was achieved principally through the promotion of nationalism and patriotic virtue. Nationalism became 'a kind of secular religion' (Hosmer 1965, 88) and a principal motivating force in the preservation of sites deemed historically important. Bellah's concept of civil religion as experienced by mid nineteenth-century Americans supports this interpretation. In his formulation, civil religion is an ideology that draws upon traditional religious symbols and practices to encourage citizenry participation in patriotic activities so that 'America [may] be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as men can make it.' (Bellah 1997, 36) Civil religion was not a concept new to the fractured America of the 1850s. The nation's Founding Fathers had drawn upon classical notions of the republic 'for molding, socializing, and educating the citizens into the ethical and spiritual beliefs so they ...[became] internalized as republican virtue.' (Bellah 1980, 16) From the outset they incorporated the rhetoric of civil religion into their documents, sermons and speeches. Although the classical traditions which the Founding Fathers drew upon had become irrelevant by 1850 – 'democracy, anti-intellectualism, materialism, and faith in progress made the classical past useless and derisory' (Lowenthal 1985, 112) – the principles of classicism were so ingrained in the rituals of civil religion that Americans continued to call upon them. New traditions relied on Old World rhetoric.

Scholars of anthropology, theology and sociology have debated the nature and validity of secular religion since the late nineteenth-century. Whether using the term 'nationalism' or 'civil religion', the basis remains constant. These non-theological yet religious dimensions draw extensively upon historical and cultural traditions even to the extent of providing the citizens with parades, processions, and pilgrimages to the new nation's temples: buildings that have immense historical significance in creation narratives such as 'Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Faneuil Hall in Boston, the shrine to General Lee in Lexington ... the city of Washington with its stately Capitol, its White House, its great monuments to Lincoln and Washington, and its adjacent Arlington and Mount

Vernon.’ (Hayes 1926, 108-109) Documents associated with the creation of the Republic took on spiritual importance: the ‘Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were the sacred Scriptures’; Lincoln’s Gettysburg address became ‘part of the “New Testament” among civil scriptures.’ (Bellah 1997, 27, 29) New holy days that allowed for a ritualistic element to the religion were introduced into the calendar: 4<sup>th</sup> July, the Nation’s birthday; George Washington’s and Thomas Jefferson’s birthdays; Memorial Day; Thanksgiving, a secular celebration of the Nation’s inherited favour from God. Civil religion persists today, but in these more inclusive, socially responsive times, new heroes, sites for pilgrimage, and forms of ritual are acknowledged. Principal among these heroes is Martin Luther King Jr., the African-American George Washington: his birthday is celebrated, and his birthplace is now a house museum in the traditional Great Man style.

In order to promote the achievements of the Founding Fathers, secular religionists had to create relevant traditions, narratives, and rituals with which these heroes could be venerated. New narratives served to inculcate the sacred exploits of the revolutionary hero into the civic consciousness. Creators of these narratives did not actively seek to distort the truth, but rather sought ‘to transfigure reality so that it provide[ed] moral and spiritual meaning to individuals’ and society as a whole. (Bellah 1975, 3) Over time, these creation narratives became absorbed into the nation’s sense of identity. In the current push for authenticity in interpretation and preservation, challenging these established narratives has proven incredibly difficult. As Old World historical and religious traditions were so much a part of the nineteenth-century New World psyche, so too these creation narratives have become a part of what it means to be a patriotic American today, and house museum creators continue to draw on them.

### Patriotic Pilgrimage as a Tool of Civil Religion

Many of the creation narratives were associated with buildings: sites of victories and losses of Revolutionary battles, and houses that had once sheltered republican heroes or been their homes in times of peace, all assumed spiritual qualities. Calling upon the patriotic deeds of the men associated with these sites became a catch cry of the preservation movement, the beginnings of which paralleled the

house museum movement. Having been transformed into public museums, highlighting the patriotic tenor was a primary consideration in the presentation of the site. These sites became tools of the moral elite, locations in which civic loyalty could be taught and national identities constructed. (Barthel 1996, 34) They became the pilgrimage destinations of the new, secular, civil religion. Houses were particularly popular for they represented more than emotional and psychological remnants. As physical reminders of the revolutionary hero's life they were relics: thus almost his mortal remains.

House museums as sites of pilgrimage offered a new, but not unexpected, incarnation of an ancient ritual. A quarter of a century before the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association rescued Mount Vernon, the plantation had become a place of pilgrimage. In 1832, the centenary of George Washington's birth, people were travelling to the shrine to pay homage at his tomb, which rests on the property. (Schwartz 1987, 1-2) In fact the homes of many figures associated with the creation of the United States became popular sites for travellers long before they were to become museums. Pilgrimage was an implicitly accepted activity of patriotic Americans, ready to be cultivated by house museum creators.

Numerous writers have referred to museum visiting as pilgrimage. Writing primarily in the late twentieth-century, and drawing upon many disciplinary approaches, these commentators often blur the distinction between pilgrimage and tourism in contemporary society. Morinis identifies the secular phenomenon of visiting shrines as sharing in 'many of the older, deeper cultural paradigms and processes of pilgrimage.' (Morinis 1992, 5) Modern tourism 'developed from the originally contrary movements of the pilgrimage and travel': now traditional pilgrimage is perceived as tourism, and tourism as pilgrimage. (Cohen 1992, 52-53) MacCannell illustrates the similarities of tourism and pilgrimage by identifying the purpose of a pilgrim's or tourist's quest as being the search 'for authentic experiences'. For the pilgrim the site has to be one where a critical religious event actually occurred. For tourists, sites visited have strong visceral ties to events or people who are socially, historically and/or culturally important. (MacCannell 1973, 593) Home's argument is that pilgrimage and tourism both

offer 'cults of the dead'. The pilgrim-tourist venerates their hero by visiting his tomb or by paying homage at monuments or museums. (Home 1984, 18) Graburn actually interchanges pilgrimage and tourism depending on the period discussed: 'Tourism has a stated, or unstated but culturally determined, goal that has changed through the ages. For traditional societies the rewards of pilgrimages were accumulated grace and moral leadership in the home community. The rewards of modern tourism are phrased in terms of values we now hold up for worship: mental and physical health, social status, and diverse, exotic experiences.' (Graburn 1989, 28) In essence the ritual associated with museum visiting, the focus of the visitor's quest, the attainment of a goal whether spiritual, emotional or physical, all parallel pilgrimage in its traditional form. Morinis, writing about pilgrimage from an anthropological perspective, describes it as 'a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal.' This quest is conventionally achieved at a physical shrine. (Morinis 1992 a, 4) Given that house museums are principal shrines of civil religion and are relics of the hero's life and therefore possess a secular sacredness, the action of tourists travelling to these sites can very satisfactorily be defined as pilgrimage, as journeys to sacred places.

Great Man house museums of the mid nineteenth-century embodied an ideal. Here were the homes of the nation's greatest patriots: in this role these sites became beacons for those on patriotic quests. The numinosity of the site was what these pilgrim-tourists sought. As with medieval pilgrims, the attainment of their goal was reached when they came into contact with the relic, the object that embodied the spirit of the quest. For the pilgrims of civil religion the house is this relic, the physical reminder of the venerated dead's mortal life. As a structure in which the hero had lived, the house assumed his personality, and contact with his *numen* enabled the pilgrim-tourist to comprehend his sacrifices and great deeds. Great Man house museums became models of noble example, a concept espoused by advocates of civil religion and self-help writers in the nineteenth century. Their conviction was that contact with such a relic would inspire patriotic pilgrims to believe that they too could achieve greatness, if they lived their lives in the image of their hero. (Barthel 1996; Hosmer 1965; Lindgren 1991; McDannell 1986;

Smiles 1897) In the words of the original guru of self-improvement, Samuel Smiles, as records of noble lives Great Man houses served as ‘model[s] for others to form themselves by in all time to come.’ (Smiles 1897, 37)

### Hero Worship and Civil Religion in the United States

The great man makes history - and is consumed by it. He swiftly becomes a symbol, perhaps many symbols, through which men of different persuasions and at different times seek to comprehend their experiences and state their purposes. (Peterson 1960, 443)

In the mid nineteenth-century heroes of the New World were necessary for the creation of new traditions and new interpretations of nationhood. In the United States, civil religion relied on the cult of hero worship for its success. Heroes were similarly important to Old World cultural commentators in this period. ‘The Victorian age was an age of hero-worship when the qualities of the heroic individual set the standard of morality and patriotism. Heroes stood for something more than themselves and won admiration by triumphing over circumstances.’ (Davison 2000, 22) In the United States, distance from the Old World – both literally and emotionally – was well defined, but in Australia, still very much a part of the Empire, allegiance to the Old World dominated cultural traditions and national identity. But this Old World dominance did not go unchallenged. While Australians ‘honoured the heroes of the Old World ... [they] recognised, almost from the beginning, the need for heroes of their own.’ (Davison 2000, 22)

Thomas Carlyle, writing and lecturing in the mid nineteenth-century, advocated that the role that hero worship played in history was a well established and acceptable approach to historical study: the ‘History of the World ... was the Biography of Great Men’. (Carlyle 1893, 12) Great Men, as Carlyle refers to his heroes in an 1840 lecture, are worthy to stand alongside that greatest hero of all, God. ‘Worship of a Hero is transcendent admiration of the Great Man. ... Hero-worship, heartfelt prostrate admiration, submission, burning, boundless, for a noblest godlike Form of Man — is not that the germ of Christianity itself?’ (Carlyle 1893, 10-11) We see here the presentation of hero worship as a necessary

condition of Christian tradition. And from this tradition, we acknowledge the role hero worship has played in pilgrimage, both in pre-Christian cultures – Ancient Greece, Rome – and in western Christian traditions spanning from early medieval pilgrimages to the contemporary pilgrimage of house museum visitors. For Carlyle, the *numen* of a great man is so strong that recognition of his hero status has to bring benefits to those who look upon him; ‘does not every true man feel that he is himself made higher by doing reverence to what is really above him?’ (Carlyle 1893, 13-14)

Hero worship is no longer a fashionable focus of historical enquiry in the United States or Australia, though biographical histories retain their popularity and the Great Man model maintains a strong influence on house museums. The continuing popular interest in biographical history has paralleled a shift from hero to ancestor worship. This transition is not as awkward as it first appears, for hero worship is in essence a sub-set of ancestor worship. Anthropological definitions of ancestor worship support this premise:

Not all ancestors are equally worthy of worship, for some are regarded as being more powerful than others. Ordinary members of a group, when dead, are tended only by their immediate relatives or perhaps not at all ... while the spirits of great personages become the focus for more elaborate cultic expression by an entire community. Seniority as well as prominence may have brought about the emergence of a dead person to the rank of a worshipful ancestor. (McHenry 1992)

Thus ancestor worship has always played its part in society, but on an intimate rather than public scale. The hero status afforded the great became a public demonstration of worship. With the advent of inclusive social policies, there has been a recognition that all ancestors deserve acknowledgement for their contributions to society. I believe this re-evaluation of ancestor worship in the public arena can in part be attributed to the increasing interest in family history. The impact of genealogy upon historical study has not been widely addressed, though Davison notes that the United States and Australia lead the world in the

number of citizens researching their family histories. His conclusion from this survey is that 'it is ... in modern, recently founded, "non-traditional" societies that the search for ancestors is most vigorously pursued.' (Davison 2000, 80) He proceeds to identify major periods of interest in family history, which surge in times of social unrest:

In the United States there have been three major waves of interest in family history - one, in the 1870s, in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War; a second in the 1930s, the decade that also saw the birth of the Australian genealogical movement, and the third, paralleling our own family history boom, in the 1970s and 1980s. These were times of social disruption when family links were threatened by war, depression or rising divorce rates. (2000, 82)

Could the passion for genealogy connect with the taste for ancestor worship, and thus fortify the sacred character of Social History house museums? Genealogical study allows everyday people to acknowledge the role their forebears played in their nation's development. It is ancestor worship at a very personal, intimate level. Genealogy 'is the flesh and blood of history. It is an aspect of history ... which brings alive the discoveries, colonisations, philosophies, disciplines of learning, social, political and economic development. In short, genealogy paints the portraits of those who down the ages have brought about the civilisation, the way of life, in which we ... exist.' (McLaughlin 3-4; qt in Blaze 1977) Genealogists do not write heroic, biographical histories; rather they write the history of everyday people. In researching their personal family histories, genealogists have drawn attention to a huge, untapped resource. Our shared ancestors' everyday lives can provide historians with valuable insight into daily life. The methodological approach employed by family historians and the recognition that these tales contribute to the panorama of history have been widely adopted at Social History house museums, and also now underpin research activities at the foundational Great Man house museums.

Changing historiography and changing public expectations have seen a shift from the monumental, biographical models espoused by Carlyle in the nineteenth



century, to more egalitarian, inclusive models at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Family history is one area of historical study that mirrors this changing historical perspective. Though not generally listed in the new histories as identified by the social history paradigm, its impact upon historiography and house museums is undeniable, especially the Social History genre. 'Family history at the level of the common man is seen as being as important in a nation's history as the story of the great families.' (Gunson 216; qt in Blaze 1977) In genealogical study the foci of interpretation are everyday people: our common ancestors whose life stories are presented as representative of a shared heritage. Direct lineage, while very important to individuals researching their family history, is not essential to the heritage industry's adoption of ancestor worship; what is relevant is the acknowledgement of everyday people's achievements as foundation stones upon which nations were built.

The way heroes are perceived in the late twentieth-century has shifted markedly in response to egalitarian principles and the demise of monumental, biographical history. The issue now is less whether there is a direct familial association to our chosen heroes, but what relevance the actions of these heroes had upon the common, national heritage. These heroes have become ancestors for all. This allows histories to be rewritten, to become more inclusive and more representative of the actuality of the hero's life; to contextualize his achievements rather than focus upon his great deeds in isolation.

### Domestic Religion – or the Cult of Domesticity – in the United States

Civil religion and the cult of hero worship provided the sustaining philosophy for the new house museum movement: domestic religion with its focus upon the sanctity of the home encouraged the genre's success. Essentially an aspect of civil religion, domestic religion combined 'traditional religious symbols with a set of middle-class domestic values'. (McDannell 1986, 151) The ideology of domestic religion was based on the belief that moral codes learnt within the home, when practiced in the public arena, would strengthen the national character. The principles of domesticity did not explicitly inform the new house museum

movement, but its popularity and easily recognizable message created an atmosphere conducive to the creation of this new museum form.

Alexis de Tocqueville, touring the United States in 1831, acknowledges the existence of a domestic ideology, recording his findings thus: 'But when the American retires from the turmoil of public life to the bosom of his family, he finds in it the image of order and of peace. ... the American derives from his own home that love of order, which he afterwards carries with him into public affairs.' (De Tocqueville 1835, 230) A structured domestic order, which would exercise wider social control, was considered 'necessary and appropriate in a democratic republic.' (Cott 1997, 94)

Domestic religion was not unique to the United States. It also found favour in Britain where Samuel Smiles and John Ruskin, widely read in the United States, promoted its powers. In *Self-Help* (first published in 1859) Smiles stressed that domesticity was 'one of the most potent of instructors ... the examples set in our Homes must always be of vastly greater influence in forming the characters of our future men and women. The Home is the crystal of society - the nucleus of national character; and from the source, be it pure or tainted, issue the habits, principles and maxims, which govern public as well as private life.' (1897, 361) The landscape architect and author Andrew Jackson Downing promoted Ruskin's teachings in the United States during the 1840s. In line with Ruskin's belief that 'domestic architecture was a critical moral issue' (Wright 1980, 12) Downing summarized his notions of the home as a civilizing agent thus: 'when smiling lawns and tasteful cottages begin to embellish a country, we know that order and culture are established.' (qt in Lynes, 1949, 22)

The message of domestic religion's morally uplifting code was extensively promoted in nineteenth-century literature. The famous Beecher sisters, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Catherine Beecher, were avid exponents of the virtues of domesticity. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) 'displayed the vivid mid nineteenth-century faith in the moral power of the home environment' (West 1999, 2) while Catherine's advice book, *The American Woman's Home*, 'began with the idea that the home was a perfect vehicle for national unity

because it was a universally experienced institution.’ (West 1999, 2) Biographies of prominent Americans complemented the messages presented in contemporary fiction and self-help manuals. Handlin identifies a number of fashionable nineteenth-century biographies that emphasized the important influence of the childhood home to an individual’s success. The first book devoted to this theme, *Homes of American Authors*, was published in 1852. It contained chapters on famous, contemporary authors among them Bryant, Cooper, Hawthorne and Irving. Each account had illustrations of the author’s home and a text that underlined the importance of the birthplace in his artistic development. *Homes of American Authors* was so successful that a companion volume, *Homes of American Statesmen*, soon followed. In this publication the private personas of Washington, Jefferson, Clay, Everett and Webster (to name a few) were revealed through accounts of their successful public lives and the residences that influenced them. William Makepeace Thayer’s books *From Pioneer Home to White-House* (Abraham Lincoln), *From Farm House to White-House* (George Washington) and *From Log-Cabin to White-House* (James Garfield) followed the same theme. (Handlin 1979, 21)

Such printed works provided a popular medium for the promotion of the power of the domestic ideal. The focus on statesmen, especially presidents, identifies the mid nineteenth-century interest in heroes that dominated historical enquiry and underpinned civil religion. The new house museum movement drew upon the moral messages advocated by domestic religion. As an ideology it informed interior display, providing lifestyle examples for patriotic Americans to follow.

The cult of domesticity maintained its cultural presence throughout the nineteenth century, notably influencing contemporary literature. As the house museum movement evolved, however, domestic religion’s influence was superseded by patriotic hero worship, pilgrimage and civil religion. At the end of the nineteenth century domestic religion had shifted from being an ideology that supported civil religion, to one that informed a new interpretive style that was to dominate house museum display in the early twentieth-century: Colonial Revival.

The Colonial Revival interpretive style was a mythical representation of America's colonial and Federal era, loosely defined to mean the period prior to 1840 – a time unsullied by industrialization and mass immigration – expressed in furniture, art and design. In its simplest form, it encouraged the display of pre-industrial-styled, American-crafted furniture. Later it became an aesthetic, influencing interior presentation and contemporary design. Its success depended on a belief in an American golden age which equated with an American ideal. (Axelrod 1985, Conn 1998, Rhoads 1977)

Colonial Revival had been alluded to in mid to late nineteenth-century house museums in which displays were modelled according to an 1850s understanding of genteel living rather than a 1770s reality. By the early twentieth-century Colonial Revival was more sophisticated and had become *the* interpretive focus for Great Man house museums. Museums and their curators, patriotic organizations, and heritage sites like Colonial Williamsburg also adopted the Colonial Revival interpretive style. Colonial Revival was the physical embodiment of an American ideal and in the late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century was blatantly used as a tool to assimilate new Americans. In the introduction to the book that accompanied the Metropolitan Museum of Art's American Wing,<sup>3</sup> Halsey and his co-writer Tower admit that the objective of the presentation was the 'Americanization of many of our people, to whom so much of our history is little known.' (Halsey 1929, xxii) Americans with ancestries that could be traced back to colonial times enthusiastically supported the Colonial Revival style. Thus the Colonial Revival interior implicitly represented physical and social exclusivity, while apparently proclaiming the owner's adherence to the traditions and principles of American democracy. Adopting a Colonial Revival aesthetic was therefore considered a great act of nationalism: 'The patriotic Americans who treasure the memory of our forefathers can do no better today than to reproduce in their homes the furniture and decorations which have been so well preserved and arranged by the builders of the American Wing.'

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<sup>3</sup> Opened in 1924 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

(Frelinghuysen (1927) "Early American Exhibition" *DAR Magazine* LXI (January): 13; qt in Hosmer 1965, 233)

### Civil Religion as Interpreted in Australia

The house museum movement in Australia was never so structured as in the United States. Australia's first house museum, Vaucluse House, opened to the public in 1912; interpretation was centered on the house's principal male inhabitant, William Charles Wentworth. Initially just a great man of Australian history, the Trustees worked at creating a patriotic narrative for Wentworth's life that enabled them to promote Vaucluse House as a shrine to a first true Australian.

Civil religion as identified by Bellah is distinctly American in origin and practice. Patriotism, a cornerstone of American style civil religion, did have the same resonance in other nations, including the newly federated Commonwealth of Australia. The dominant historical paradigm at the turn of the twentieth century, monumental history, advocated many of the principles of civil religion, relying on the identification of founding figures who undertook heroic events: it was 'traditionally linked to patriotic fervor and the establishment and reinforcement of collective nationhood.' (McCubbin 1999, 37) Creating their museum in the age of monumental history, the Trustees of Vaucluse House naturally incorporated its principles into early presentations. Wentworth was constructed as the patriotic hero, Vaucluse House as a shrine. The Australian public were thus introduced to the well-established Great Man model of house museum and indirectly to the civil religion that sustained it.

For civil religion to thrive however, there had to be individual, identifiable heroes and sacred sites where significant national events took place. I believe that one of the reasons Australians did not adopt civil religion was the absence of such heroes and sites. For Australians were proudly nationalistic, and as we see in the Vaucluse House chapter, keen to promote patriotic pilgrimage. The English writer and social commentator Richard Jebb noted this emerging nationalism in the accounts of his travels of the Empire (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa) at the turn of the twentieth century. Jebb wrote that though these nations'

allegiances to the Empire were strong, they had each developed a unique national consciousness, which Jebb defined as 'colonial nationalism'. (Eddy 1988)

Federation in 1901 was a self-defining moment in Australia's history: the war of 1914 to 1918 was the next event to mould the national psyche. The First World War provides a paradox for analysts of Australian patriotism. For the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) soldiers, all volunteers, died in the name of the British Empire. But they fought believing that their own homeland, Australia, would be lost if the common enemy prevailed. They were thus consciously fighting for the freedom of Australia under the banner of the Empire. (Eddy 1988, Cochrane 1992, Curthoys 1997) World War I, especially the campaign at Gallipoli in 1915, produced a new image of Australian hero. The 'digger' became synonymous with Australian character, pride, nationalism and identity. But he was an anonymous hero in an era that still commemorated the monumental individual.

Herein lies the problem for civil religion and indirectly Great Man house museums in the first half of the twentieth century. The new nation of Australia was beginning to make a history of its own (Webber 1986, 165-166) and in the process sought new heroes and sacred sites. But at this stage the nation-building heroes were anonymous and the defining moments happened overseas. With no identifiable hero and no sacred site in Australia, civil religion could not take root. It has only been since the post-1970's reappraisal of Australian history (Chapter 5) that Australians have begun to identify individuals of the twentieth century for the role they played in shaping the nation. (Chapter 8) Sporting heroes and early Australian prime ministers are now venerated at house museums. These new Great Man house museums are clothed in the professional, intellectual rhetoric of contemporary house museum practice, but their existence alerts us to a new phase in the Great Man house museum evolution in Australia, and potentially to the adoption, or at least appropriation, of civil religion.

After the opening of Vaucluse House and Cook's Cottage<sup>4</sup> (see page 54), the house museum movement in Australia fizzled. Not until the creation of the very elite membership-based National Trust of New South Wales (1947), South Australia (1955) and Victoria (1956) were more houses converted to museum status. The motive behind such rescues was no longer premised on the civic or historical virtue of the sites' former residents however; architectural value became the principal selection criteria.

Civil religion as expressed in the Great Man model in the United States thus suited the needs of a developing Australia. However the lack of identifiable, individual, Australian heroes and sacred sites meant the ideology, and therefore the Great Man house museum movement, ceased after the creation of Australia's first two house museums. It has since been resuscitated thanks to changing historiography and cultural conditions. (Chapters 5 & 8)

### **House Museums**

#### **Vehicles for Civil Religion**

House museum founders drew upon ancient traditions of hero worship to help promote the rescue of houses. Venerating heroes at houses in which they had once (no matter how briefly) lived provided sites for pilgrimage, and venues in which civic virtue could be encouraged. Old World traditions were interpreted by mid nineteenth-century Americans keen to establish a new world identity which was democratic and Republican.

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<sup>4</sup> 'In the past the cottage was called Cook's Cottage, an endorsement that dated from the 1930s ... More recently it has become Cooks' Cottage (that is, the cottage of the Cooks). On the basis of considerable scholarly research, historians have testified and imposed a different consensus on the status of the cottage.' (Healy 1997, 30, 32)

If our love of country is excited when we read the biography of our revolutionary heroes, or the history of revolutionary events, how much more still the flames of patriotism burn in our bosoms when we tread the ground where was shed the blood of our fathers, or when we move among the stones where were conceived and consummated their noble achievements. ... No traveller who touches upon the shores of Orange County will hesitate to make a pilgrimage to this beautiful spot, associated as it is with so many delightful reminiscences of our early history. And if he have an American heart in his bosom, he will feel himself to be a better man; his patriotism will kindle with deeper emotion; his aspirations for his country's good will ascend from a more devout mind, for having visited "Headquarters of Washington". (New York State Legislature, Assembly Select Committee on the Petition of Washington Irving and Others to Preserve Washington's Headquarters at Newburgh, no. 356, 27.03.1839; 1839; qt in Alexander 1983, 195)

Hasbrouck House, George Washington's revolutionary headquarters in Newburgh, embodied all the prerequisites for what was to become the Great Man genre of house museums. Purchased by the State of New York in 1850, Hasbrouck House's transition from residence to museum occurred fortuitously. Jonathan Hasbrouck, the house's owner, had borrowed \$2000 from the Commissioners of the United States Deposit Fund in 1838. He did not make the annual payment in 1848 and thus the government called in his loan. As Hasbrouck House had been used for collateral the government took possession of the property and put it up for sale. They were unable to sell the property so Hasbrouck House was bid-in to the State of New York. A legislative committee was appointed to study the preservation of Hasbrouck House: fully aware of George Washington's associations with the house, they argued that it should become a national monument in his honour. The debt incurred by the house's former owner Jonathan Hasbrouck was paid off, and an additional \$6,000 was appropriated for the purchase of land around the house in order to protect the site. General Winfield Scott travelled up the Hudson from West Point on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1850, to raise the flag over the first house museum in the United States. (Hosmer 1965, 37)



The sentiment of the legislative committee and the ceremony surrounding the opening of the first house museum supported the idea that Hasbrouck House's museum founders were fully aware of the role this house could play in fostering the civic ideals of the new nation. George Washington's status as hero was sufficient encouragement for Hasbrouck House's preservation. His *numen* was deemed to still be present imbuing the physical structure of the house: communion with the spirit of Washington became the focus of pilgrimage.

To perpetuate the sacred memory of "The Father of His Country" and, with loving hands, to guard and protect the hallowed spot where rest his mortal remains. (MVLA objective; qt in Schwartz 1967, 127)

The apotheosis of the Great Man genre came in 1860, with the opening of Mount Vernon by Anne Pamela Cunningham's Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (MVLA). Mount Vernon, George Washington's plantation and principal home, was imbued with the spirit of the man. It was also the site of his burial. Today visitors can pay tribute to Washington at the 'old' tomb in which he was originally interred, and at the 'new' tomb (built in 1831) which is replete with the Star Spangled Banner and eternal flame. Both tombs are very much a part of the pilgrim-tourist experience.

The success of Washington as the ideal American hero was his universal appeal to all sides of politics. He was above party divides and came to be regarded as a cohesive agent in times of dispute. Nonetheless, proposals that the United States Government acquire Mount Vernon had been made and rejected by Congress in 1846, 1848 and 1850. (Garvey 1968, 7) Yet the failure of the United States Government to act and the subsequent rescue of Mount Vernon by a privately organized association, allowed George Washington to maintain his role as political non-partisan.

Mount Vernon is the archetypal Great Man house museum, the model for all subsequent house museums in this genre, and the ideal that other house museum creators endeavour to emulate. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, any house associated with George Washington and his revolutionary campaign

acquired a degree of numinosity which inspired potential house museum founders. George Washington was the primary focus of house museum creation over the next half century in the eastern states: among those houses translated to museum status were Washington's Headquarters at Morristown and Somerville, NJ; Valley Forge, PA; and Rockingham, Rocky Hill, NJ. After the Civil War houses of other presidents and American heroes were also candidates for translation to house museums: e.g. Lincoln Homestead, Springfield, IL; John Adams Birthplace and John Quincy Adams Birthplace both in Quincy, MA; U.S. Grant Cottage, Mt McGregor, NY; Betsy Ross House, Philadelphia, PA; The Hermitage, Hermitage, TN; Mary Washington House, Fredericksburg, VA.

Despite the predominantly female influence upon house museums and the preservation movement in mid nineteenth-century America (Hosmer 1965, West 1999), all but two house museums created before 1900 venerated great men, sites of the Revolutionary war, or vernacular architecture. The two house museums that focused upon the lives of women did so for the women's relationship to the Revolution and Revolutionary heroes. Mary Washington House, as the home of George Washington's mother, became an important site on the pilgrimage trail. Opened in 1892, pilgrim-tourists travelled to this house, bought by George Washington for Mary Washington, in order to revere the mother of America's creation hero. The Betsy Ross House is a shrine to the Star Spangled Banner and the woman who first stitched it. The American flag, as a symbol of liberty, freedom, and pride represents patriotic ideals and national identity. Since its opening in 1898, the Betsy Ross House has attracted patriotic response; today it is a major site on the pilgrim-tourist trail in Philadelphia, 'its popularity is third only to the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall'. ([//ushistory.org/districts/marketstreet/betsy.htm](http://ushistory.org/districts/marketstreet/betsy.htm), 13.10.2000)

### Heroes and Houses in the United States

Morinis writes that 'reverential visits to Lenin's Tomb, Mao's Mausoleum, or the Washington Monument can be considered pilgrimages if we view these founders of nations as contemporary symbols for national ideals.' (1992 a, 5) This was precisely how early house museum creators perceived their primary hero George

Washington: he was the embodiment of the American ideal. Drawing upon his role as Founding Father they successfully promoted Washington so that anything once owned or used by him attained spiritual qualities. Most notable among such possessions were his revolutionary headquarters Hasbrouck House, and his home Mount Vernon; subsequently, as his spiritual greatness grew, other wartime headquarters acquired similar importance. Rather like pieces of the True Cross, the claim that 'Washington-slept-here' (Marling 1988) radiated enough *numen* to inspire patriotic pilgrimage.

The initial success of the Great Man house museum genre was due entirely to the legendary George Washington; unquestionably Washington was the perfect hero for a patriotically inspired civil religion. Washington's position in this role was cultivated by patriots and manipulated to suit nationalistic needs. In the tumultuous pre-Civil War period the strength of Washington's unifying character was frequently called upon. 'Extollers assumed that Washington had devoted his life to the New Nation. Because he had shaped America, they were certain that he had imprinted his orderly, prudent, persevering qualities upon the character of the nation. ... the solid, stable, orderly qualities of the country's hero had become characteristic traits of the New Nation. According to this logic, the tumult and uncertainties of post-Revolutionary society were either transitory or insignificant.' (Friedman 1975, 51) In this atmosphere of post-Revolutionary uncertainty, emulating the great deeds of the nation's creator became the rationale for a flourishing civil religion.

George Washington *is* the United States' primal hero, the prototype Great Man. His status requires little explanation, allowing house museums with Washington associations to assume a level of understanding from their visitors. As the model hero, Washington 'encased the presidency in religion by his words and example, and through his powerful personality he bestowed upon the office a sacred aura. ... something of Washington's sacred-leader, father-figure role was transferred to each of the presidents.' (Pierard 1988, 86) By the end of the nineteenth century, Jefferson's and Lincoln's birthdays were celebrated along with Washington's. (Eliade 1987, 526) Washington 'the Moses-liberator figure, Jefferson the prophet,

and Lincoln the theologian of the national faith' became the holy trinity of American civil religion. (Pierard 1988, 51) It is not surprising that the homes of these other two presidential heroes were considered potential house museum shrines. Hosmer argues that at Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home, the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation had to work at 'establish[ing] the place of their hero in the American mind before they could successfully save the home itself.' (1965, 184-185) The public required educating so that they could fully appreciate Jefferson's contribution to American ideals. Hosmer's idea is that educating the public was not necessary at Mount Vernon, but I disagree. By 1923, the year Monticello became a house museum, Mount Vernon was a well-established shrine, and the George Washington legend a part of the national psyche. But creation narratives promoting George Washington's heroic achievements had been written during the early decades of the nineteenth century and these stories were emphasized at Mount Vernon when it opened to the public in 1860. The mid nineteenth-century American public had been educated in the heroic actions of Washington, just as the early twentieth-century public needed to be reminded of Jefferson's heroic activities.

In the years after Hasbrouck House and Mount Vernon became shrines of the new religion, Washington's heroic countenance continued to be promoted. During the Civil War Washington was presented as 'a symbol of unity in a divided society' (Marling 1988, 38) and in the centennial celebrations of 1876 his role as Founding Father was stressed. At the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, a number of exhibits illustrated Washington's life and achievements; in one display his uniform, casually draped over a chair, was complemented by an assortment of personal items. The informal nature of such a display emphasized the very mortal life of this now deified figure. It served as a lesson to those inculcated in the civil religion of the day that they too could achieve greatness if they adhered to the moral principles advocated by Washington (as interpreted by the principal proponents of patriotic values!) By the 1890s, the passage of time allowed 'Washington and the ancestral style he represented ... [to] become symbols of an ancient and distinctly American heritage.' (Marling 1988, 75-76)

Using the rhetoric of nineteenth-century civil religion Washington's relevance to American foundation myths continued to be promoted in the twentieth century. In a 1959 textbook children were told: 'The heroic stature of Washington was unique; he appeared rather as divinity than as man. As a Christ-like liberator the contrast between Washington and European heroes was sharp indeed. That this greatest of all men appeared in the United States is sufficient justification for American civilization.' (Miller Elson, R. (1959) "American Schoolbooks and 'Culture' in the Nineteenth Century" *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XLVI (December): 418; qt in Hosmer 1965, 41)

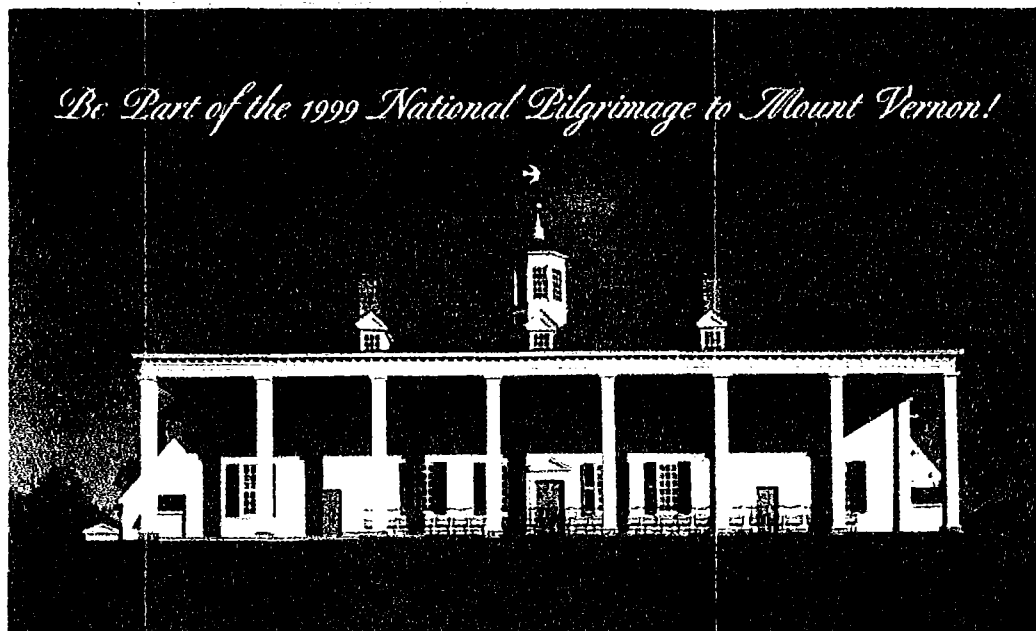


Illustration 2: Americans are encouraged to celebrate the bicentenary of Washington's death by going on a pilgrimage to his sacred home (Brochure, 1999)

Washington's role in the creation narrative is so ingrained in the American psyche, that it is virtually unchallengeable. No amount of considered scholarship and research will alter the public's perception of George Washington's heroic stature. His home, Mount Vernon, remains a site of patriotic pilgrimage as Illustration 2 so nicely illustrates. House museums that were initially identified for their role as Washington Revolutionary headquarters are re-evaluating the Washington legend. These house museums continue to rely on the *numen* of

Washington to attract pilgrim-tourists, and Washington's association with the house remains the basis of interpretation. However unlike Mount Vernon, which is blanketed by sacred narratives, more critical interpretation in tune with the social history paradigm is evident at these early Great Man house museums like those in Morristown, NJ and Valley Forge, PA.

The initial success of the Great Man house museum movement depended on such a nationally recognizable heroic figure as George Washington. As the genre evolved however, the principles of civil religion, hero worship and pilgrimage encouraged the veneration of other individuals. This shift in focus occurred shortly after the Civil War. Presidents and heroes of the Civil War were acknowledged for their contributions to American nationhood. Concurrently, a number of communities began to identify individuals who merited veneration at a local rather than national level. Gradually homes of these newly recognized heroes were translated to museum status. As the Great Man model embodied the essence of civil religion, it became the touchstone for all house museums established for their historical associations in the latter part of the nineteenth century. By the turn of the twentieth century other great individuals like writers and local businessmen began to be constructed as worthy for their contribution to American society. By the turn of the century George Washington and the revolutionary era no longer dominated selection criteria. Patriotism was still encouraged at the homes of presidents and Civil War heroes. Hero worship remained the *raison d'être* behind a house's rescue and promotion, with the hero's *numen* continuing to determine perceived significance. This presumed spiritual attachment to place encouraged preservationists and pilgrim-tourists alike.

### Heroes and Houses in Australia

The evolution of Great Man house museums in Australia follows that of the United States. However the movement has never engendered the same popular enthusiasm in Australia as that received in the United States. I believe this is largely attributable to the absence of one universally accepted Australian creation hero. Without a central focus for hero worship, early Great Man house museum

creators in Australia could only appropriate the principles of the American model, moulding various influential men to fit the George Washington role.

As Washington's and Jefferson's virtues were acknowledged, expounded and imbued into the understanding of their homes, so too were William Charles Wentworth's. It was Wentworth's role as New South Wales' Constitution Drafter and early Australian nativist that the Trustees focused upon in the developmental years of Vaucluse House. (Chapter 3) Once the Trustees identified Wentworth's heroic role in national history, the creation of suitable narratives to promote his status and, by extension, his home got underway. Wentworth's achievements were likened to those of George Washington, and veneration of Wentworth in the same manner was deemed entirely appropriate. Washington was not only the prototype hero for the Great Man house museum genre; he was also the prototype great man for new nations keen to establish traditions, symbols and rituals. Manipulating Wentworth's status was not too difficult, for he played an important part in New South Wales' history, and his home, grand in comparison to many other buildings, fulfilled the necessary requirements for a model Great Man house museum. In the nineteenth century, Wentworth was perceived by some to be a Founding Father: a statesman who was proud of his Australian birth. The nativist writer and poet, Henry Kendall, lauded Wentworth as an Australian hero and visionary for the otherwise unlovely convict colony, composing the words for a song written in honour of 'our great Australian Patriot W. C. Wentworth':

Honor the Hero! the laurelled Australian  
He who stood out in the dark elder days,  
Fighting our battles, when Freedom, an alien,  
Paled in false splendour, in Tyranny's blaze.  
Honor the Hero! the fine, fearless spirit,  
Liberty's grandest Hierophant here,  
He through whose sacrifices, lo, we inherit,  
All that the sons of old England hold dear. ...  
Honor him therefore, our WENTWORTH deserving,  
Praise, and the homage that never can die.  
(Kendall, H. (1872) "Honor the Hero"; qt in Reed 1966, 390)

But this hero status was not universally acknowledged. Wentworth was not admired by all – colonial Tories considered him a 'demagogue and destroyer'.

(Inglis 1993, 291) He did not unite society, and while his actions were definitely patriotic, Wentworth's pull waned as the Australian nation moved toward Federation in 1901. Wentworth was then relegated to being a hero of New South Wales rather than a hero for all Australians, ironic given that he was the first Australian to advocate Federation.

Wentworth may not have been an obvious hero to follow the George Washington prototype, but his home Vacluse House, having been serendipitously rescued and opened as a museum, was after a few years being referred to in terms of its likeness to Mount Vernon. The more the likeness took hold, the more pronounced was the adoption of the American Great Man house museum model, as sustained by civil religion.

In early twentieth-century Australia there was only one contender for the role of creation hero in the George Washington vein and that was Captain James Cook. For almost 200 years Cook was credited with the discovery of Australia in 1770. At the centenary of his discovery, Cook was considered 'a very suitable great man. He was British, unsectarian, rose by merit from modest beginnings, sailed the world, enlarged scientific knowledge, prevented scurvy *and* discovered Australia.' (Inglis 1993, 287) But most important for the contemporary public, he was not tarred by the convict brush. By the late nineteenth-century some writers challenged the power of Cook as principal Australian hero; for them, Cook was a symbol of an Imperial tradition. However his appeal maintained popular support. Early loyalists considered him the nation's Founding Father. William Charles Wentworth himself venerated Cook thus:

Illustrious Cook! Columbus of our shore,  
To whom was left this unknown world to explore;  
Its untract'd bounds on faithful chart to mark,  
And leave a light where all before was dark:  
(Wentworth 1823, 7-8)

There was one major hindrance with the promotion of Cook as Australia's Founding Father: no physical evidence of his presence in the country. There was no tomb at which he could be worshipped and only a handful of relics in Australian museum collections. It was in this desolate atmosphere that in 1933



Melbourne businessman Russell Grimwade came up with the idea of purchasing evidence: transporting to Australia a house with which Cook was allegedly associated, thus providing a physical presence. Such an act reinforced the notion that Australian history was continuous with British history. Cook's Cottage, relocated to Melbourne, gave James Cook a physical presence on Australian soil at last; it became a shrine for worship, a place of education about Australian and British history, and a site at which to inculcate patriotic sentiment. As Grimwade himself wrote: 'It was to introduce some solid reminder of the old world to this young country that first stimulated me to bring out the cottage and to endeavour to foster national traditions that must necessarily be absent in so young a country as our own.' (From Grimwade to J H Adney, 02.02.1936, Grimwade Papers, 15/4; qt in Healy 1997, 35) With its focus on one (then) indisputable Australian hero, Cook's Cottage became Australia's second house museum, again in the Great Man mould. It provided a physical site for celebration during the State of Victoria's centennial in 1934 and Australia's sesquicentennial in 1938.

As the emerging American Republic sought traditions, symbols and rituals that marked its maturity as a nation, so too did many Australians. Superficially it appeared that by the early twentieth-century one of the accepted places in which to establish such sentiments was the Great Man house museum. Australians were aware of American cultural developments (Cramp 1922, Markham 1933) and likened Australia's early house museum efforts to the prototype Great Man genre, Mount Vernon. But there was a significant drawback to the adoption of the model, which hampered its development during the mid twentieth-century. The lack of a universally acknowledged creation hero in the George Washington mould alerts us to a major reason for the genre's failing. As Inglis succinctly assesses the situation, 'Australians who wanted heroes had to choose between Cook the remote discoverer, Wentworth the flawed patriot, the grim explorers of the interior, the disreputable outlaws of the bush, the makers of the Eureka stockade and the eight-hour day, and other men of such reputation as could be nurtured within the bounds of colonial settlement and experience.' (1993, 319) After World War I, the anonymous ANZAC diggers could also be added to this list.

Hero worship is such a major component of civil religion. Vaucluse House and Cook's Cottage succeeded in the initial years because their great men were promoted as heroes worthy of veneration; their *numen* was embodied in the fabric of their homes (or so visitors were encouraged to believe). As the sustaining ideology of the movement failed to ignite the Australian public, the rationale of these two house museums changed. But the associations of Wentworth to Vaucluse House and Cook with his cottage have always expressed understanding of the houses' significance.

### Relocated Houses

By the early twentieth-century, the Great Man house museum had become so much a part of the American cultural landscape that those promoting heroes, old and new, happily adopted the principles of the established Great Man model. In some instances potential Great Man houses existed, but were situated in inappropriate locations. A few inventive individuals had no qualms about literally transporting these houses to appropriate sites; e.g. Jefferson Davis' Cabin, Lincoln's Birthplace Cabin. At these relocated house museums, it is clear that the primary consideration influencing their repositioning is the *numen* of the great man allegedly associated with the site. The house, decontextualized from its reality, can only be interpreted as a relic of the great man's existence. Nowhere is this interpretation more apparent than at Lincoln's Birthplace Cabin, Sinking Spring Farm, KY. This cabin, moved to its current location in 1916, is not aesthetically important though it has vernacular merit and its historical associations are tenuous yet thousands of pilgrim-tourists make their way to the cabin yearly to commune with the spirit of the assassinated President. The cabin was moved to its current site at the same time that Jefferson Davis' Cabin was relocated. In the course of relocation, 'the components of the two buildings became confused.' (Maines 1993, 18) Lincoln's Birthplace Cabin is an amalgam of contemporary materials, some with direct provenance, many without. The National Park Service (NPS) endeavours to 'present the cabin's provenance accurately, ... [but still the] thousands of visitors leave the park every year with the impression that they have seen the cabin in which Abraham Lincoln was

born.’ (Maines 1993, 18) The social history paradigm is evident in the NPS’s objectives for the Lincoln’s Birthplace Cabin, but the perceived *numen* of Lincoln is too strong, overpowering the NPS’s aims.

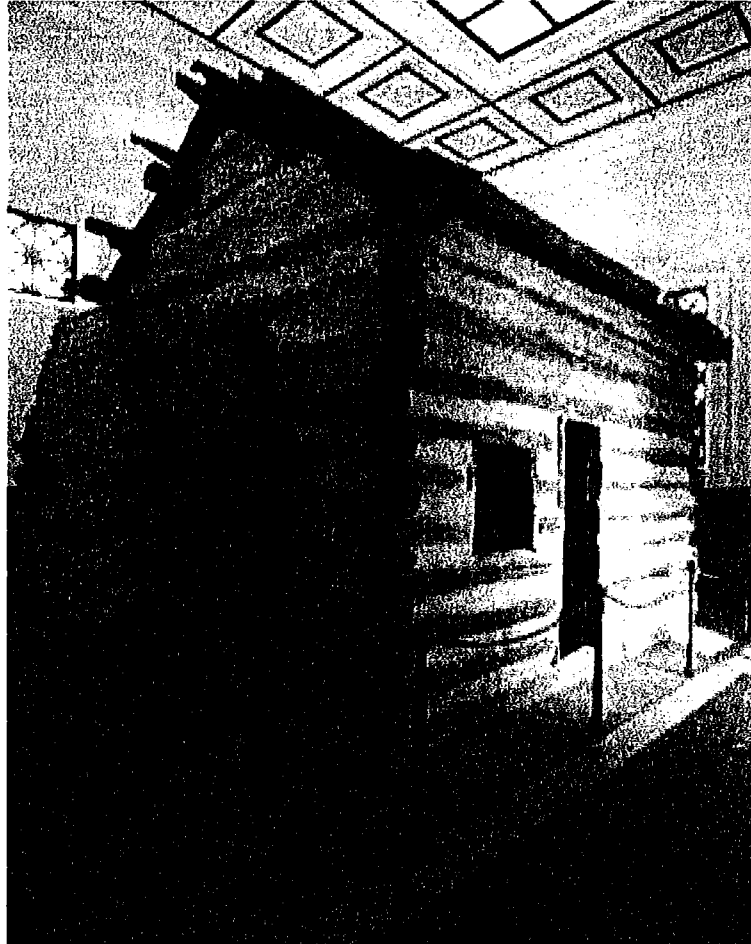


Illustration 3: Lincoln’s reconstructed and relocated  
Birthplace Cabin  
([www.uvm.edu/~jloewen/slideshow/6lincoln.htm](http://www.uvm.edu/~jloewen/slideshow/6lincoln.htm)  
21.01.2002)

Relocated houses are an interesting paradox in the Great Man house museum genre. At such sites curators have appropriated the Great Man model and adopted the principles of civil religion. But the houses themselves have, at best, tenuous links to the great men they represent. What such museums highlight is the perceived need of the public to identify a place where worship of their hero might take place. We must ask then, why the need for a house museum, rather than a specially commissioned monument or memorial, especially given that memorials to these men do exist? Was it simply because the commissioned sites lacked the

*numen* of the great man; they had no physical link to his mortal life? Relocated house museums were explicitly about paying homage to the achievements of the great man. The tenuous links to the great man were muted in the initial stages of these new museums, for it was the aura of physical attachment to the houses that the museums' creators relied upon. Lincoln's Birthplace Cabin, Jefferson Davis' Cabin, Cooks' Cottage, Governor La Trobe's Cottage, et al were relocated specifically so that they might become sites of pilgrimage. They were viewed as relics of the great man's life; symbols of the hero's humble origins; domestic sites in which virtue could be extolled, in the mould of the now well-entrenched Great Man house museum model.

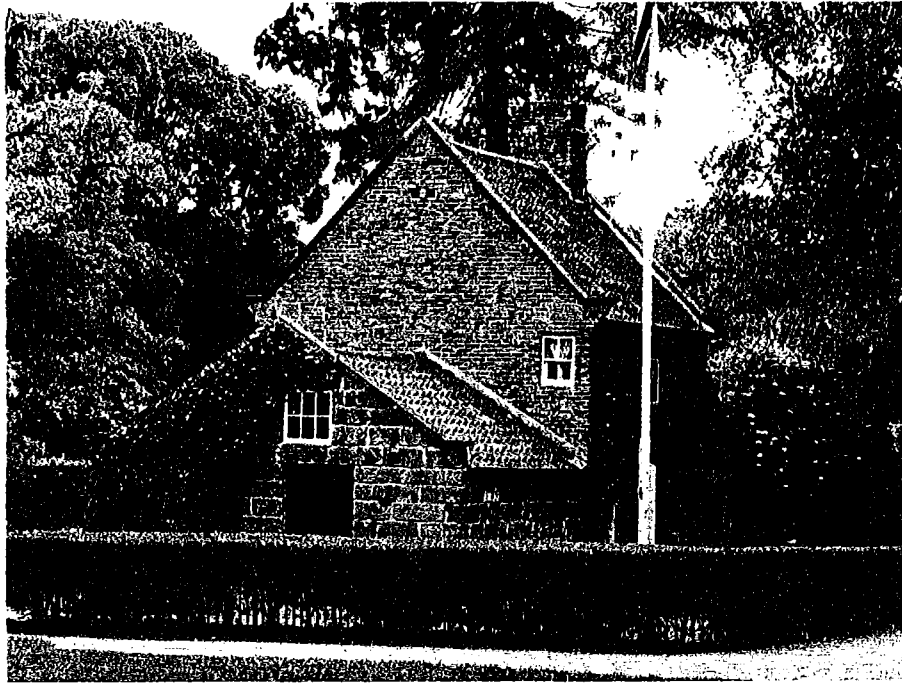


Illustration 4: Cook's Cottage in Melbourne surrounded by a fence now concealed behind a hedge  
([www.pbase.com/image/611269](http://www.pbase.com/image/611269) 21.01.2002)

In the two principal cases, Lincoln's Birthplace Cabin and Cook's Cottage, where each great man is remembered for his role in the creation of his nation and the rhetoric of his life is clothed in religious and classic iconography, it is interesting to note the way the houses are presented. To emphasize their relic status, these houses have been sited within boundaries that explicitly define a barrier between sacred site – the house – and secular life. A close perimeter fence has enclosed

Cook's Cottage, set in a major urban park. Though not too intrusive aesthetically, the fence' presence is not for effect or security, but rather is 'about marking a boundary between ordinary space and space which was to become historical and sacred.' (Healy 1997, 37) At Lincoln's Birthplace Cabin, the distinction is more pronounced, for the humble log cabin has been placed inside an impressive, neo-classical style, temple.

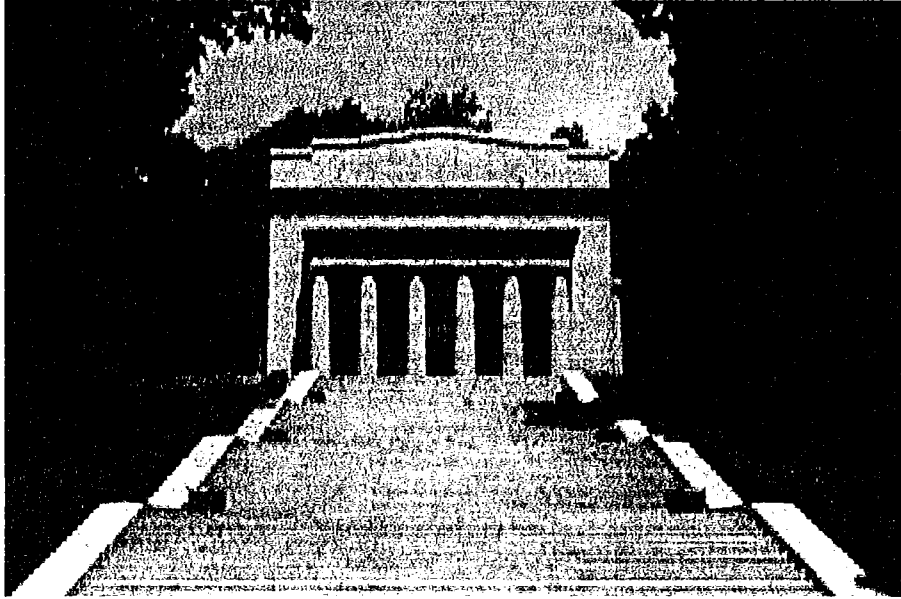


Illustration 5: The reliquary in which the relocated  
Lincoln's Birthplace Cabin rests  
([showcase.netins.net/web/creative/Lincoln/sites/birth.htm](http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/Lincoln/sites/birth.htm)  
21.01.2002)

Here the sacred nature of the house museum has reached its apogee. For a visit to Lincoln's Birthplace Cabin is indeed a pilgrimage. Here is a site where the express motive of being is the veneration of the spirit of Lincoln. Pilgrimage to this relic of Lincoln's life is a patriotic act. It represents the pilgrim-tourist's understanding of Lincoln's altruism; having absorbed this message, the pilgrim-tourist will leave the museum to continue the fight for equality and justice. The way pilgrim-tourists respond to these relocated sites is conditioned by their understanding of the Great Man house museum model, a factor relocated house museum creators rely upon.

### Concluding Thoughts

It is one of the central arguments of this thesis that the language and ritual of civil religion in the United States continues to inform new house museums. As Mount Vernon became the model for the oeuvre, so the rituals and language of civil religion became the ideology underpinning it. These elements of civil religion continue to resonate today because the tradition of gazing at heroes at Great Man house museums is so ingrained in the genre's rationale. The worship of individual heroes has faded but it still underpins interpretation. Old, sacred styles of veneration have been adopted at Social History house museums. Here we worship the achievements of our communal ancestors according to the principles established over 150 years ago at the heroic shrines of civil religion.

It is important to ask why the Great Man house museum continues to capture public attention: what motivates those responsible for encouraging the tradition, and those pilgrim-tourists who carry on paying homage at these sites? For Great Man house museums have an authority that needs to be addressed. Although the nineteenth-century cultural conditions that encouraged civil religion no longer exist, the results of their influence do: holy holidays, sacred scriptures, and pilgrimage sites. Further still, hero worship persists, despite an historical paradigm shift.



Illustration 6: Vacluse House at the turn of the twenty-first century  
(Photograph © Ray Joyce, HHT)

## Chapter 3 Creation of a Genre: Vacluse House

### Introduction

When the New South Wales (NSW) state government resumed Vacluse House in 1910, the lives of two men associated with the property in the nineteenth century constituted the house's perceived character and significance: Sir Henry Browne Hayes and William Charles Wentworth. Eventually it was Wentworth's occupation of Vacluse House that determined the house's rationale as a museum, but for many years Hayes' colourful life story complemented that of Wentworth in the house museum presentation. Hayes' presence continues to be acknowledged today, as the first resident of Vacluse Estate, and as the person responsible for naming the property.

Sir Henry Browne Hayes, 'a knight and transported felon', (Bogle 1993, 5) bought the site in 1803, one year after arriving in Australia; before his return to Ireland in 1812 he developed an estate complete with a stone cottage and outbuildings. Hayes was a notorious figure, both for the crime that had him transported and for his unruly behaviour whilst serving his sentence, though his larrikin nature endeared him to the early twentieth-century Australian public. In an article lamenting the decay of Vaucluse House, Mary Salmon describes Hayes as 'a gentleman about whose career a great amount of romantic interest is excited.' (1907, 16) Hayes was transported to Australia for kidnapping a Cork banker's daughter, Mary Pike, and forcing her to marry him. Hayes's nine-year association with Vaucluse was short, but his establishment of buildings on the property and the notoriety of his life have ensured him a place in the history of Vaucluse House. After he returned to Ireland, the estate passed through a number of hands; William Charles Wentworth purchased it from Captain John Piper in 1827.

Upon his acquisition of the estate, Wentworth set about transforming the property from a stone cottage into a grand house which served as the family home for Wentworth, his wife Sarah and their ten children until 1853, at which time they moved to England, selling all the household contents at auction before departing. Wentworth and Sarah returned to Vaucluse House briefly in 1861-1862, and Sarah returned again with his remains in 1872. Wentworth, honoured with New South Wales' first state funeral, was interred in the newly constructed family vault, then located on the Vaucluse Estate. Sarah remained at Vaucluse House until 1875, dying in England in 1880. After Sarah's death Vaucluse House passed to the Wentworths' daughter Eliza and on her death in 1898 the house and grounds reverted to the Trustees of the estate of William Charles Wentworth; the house's contents were left to Wentworth's youngest son, D'Arcy Bland Wentworth.

When the NSW government resumed the estate in 1910, Wentworth's accomplishments were deemed symbolic of all colonial pioneers. He was part of the triumvirate (Wentworth, Blaxland and Lawson) who explored a route across the Blue Mountains in 1813, thus opening up the country to further settlement. His



involvement in this expedition contributed to his legendary status as a pioneering Australian. But it was Wentworth's involvement in self-government and legal reform that contributed most to his being remembered with admiration. By 1910 Wentworth was acknowledged for his leading role in the drafting of the NSW constitution, and for introducing trial by jury. Complementing his political and legal achievements, Wentworth contributed to social reform, was central in establishing the University of Sydney (the first university in Australia) and the *Australian* newspaper. He was also an acknowledged author and poet. During his lifetime Wentworth was acclaimed by many to be a true patriot and statesman, though he also had his fair share of detractors. Thirty-five years after his death political differences had been conveniently forgotten, enabling him to be proclaimed a hero of Australian nationhood. As the book *Australia's First Patriot: The Story of William C. Wentworth*, published in 1914, affirmed:

There has been no country without its patriot; no race of people without the fearless man whose life has been devoted to his fellows; no community lacking the leader who rose superior to hardship and difficulty; no band of hardy, courageous men but one stood pre-eminent as counselor. ... Such a one was William Charles Wentworth – first native-born patriot, statesman, explorer, orator, author, and devoted friend of his native land! (Deer 1914, 1)

This literary interpretation of Wentworth's achievements persisted until challenged by the new historiography of social history. By the late 1980s his achievements were analyzed in a broader social and cultural framework. Not only was his contribution to self-government assessed more impartially, his relationship with his wife Sarah (the daughter of convicts, whom he married after the birth of their first two children) and his own convict heritage (his mother having been transported to Norfolk Island) were addressed. Previously only Wentworth's paternal heritage was documented. Even his father D'Arcy had come to NSW to escape the law, so this lineage was also glossed over so as not to tarnish Wentworth's heroic stature. Despite re-evaluation of Wentworth's position in nineteenth-century Australian society, some publications continue to emphasize

his heroic role. Of particular interest is *Some extraordinary people of New South Wales particularly of Sydney in the 1850s: The Life of W. C. Wentworth*, a booklet for NSW schools published in 1982. Its rhetoric is very like that of the 1914 publication, opening: 'William Charles Wentworth was an astonishing Australian.' He is credited with achieving 'freedoms for New South Wales in his own lifetime' (Teaching Resources Division 1982, 2). The one notable difference from early twentieth-century rhetoric is the open, though somewhat romantic, acknowledgement of his mother's convict status. What a study of current, scholarly literature shows us is that Wentworth continues to be viewed as an heroic figure, though his achievements are presented in a more egalitarian manner.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Vaucluse House was fast becoming a ruin. A caretaker had maintained the unoccupied house since 1903, but the steady decay associated with an uninhabited building could not be halted. A handful of concerned residents and journalists mourned the plight of Sydney's old buildings, including Vaucluse House:

There is something pathetic about an old house in its decay, when its days of glory are gone, and when only haunting memories of times that are no more give it interest. (Salmon 1907, 16)

In this same article, Salmon highlights Vaucluse House's association with important early colonists, amongst them Hayes and Wentworth. Supporting her lament were members of the Australian Historical Society (founded in 1901) who undertook to write biographies of many early colonists, especially those who were colourful characters or left nationally important legacies: Hayes and Wentworth were both accorded such attention.

Thus when Vaucluse Estate was resumed by the New South Wales government, an atmosphere conducive to promoting Wentworth as a Founding Father already existed. The transition from near-ruin to monument-to-Wentworth was not, however, a conscious act; rather it was a result of serendipity.

### **1910 to 1922: 'Mecca of Australian Hero Worship'**

In 1910 the NSW government was pursuing a public parks program. Vaucluse Estate's lands stretched to the banks of Sydney Harbour, thus presenting an ideal situation for a public recreation ground. Accordingly, the estate was resumed and placed under the direction of a specially created park trust. The house was maintained for it was situated within the new park, initially with no motive other than to make it safe and keep it extant. In the process of preserving the physical structure of the house, many of the estate's other buildings, including convict quarters, were demolished for salvage: 'the back premises of the old House to be repaired as far as possible, any material required to be obtained by the demolition of old buildings on the Park.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 21) Writing in 1994, Pomfrett attributes the demolition of the ruinous convict barracks to the Trustees' lack of interest in, and lack of understanding of, Vaucluse House's historical significance. She argues that the demolition in 1912 went ahead 'seemingly without protest, to make way for residential development in the area. Similarly, several small workers' cottages in the south paddock were declared unimportant and gradually destroyed.' (Pomfrett 1994, 162) But Pomfrett's late twentieth-century, social history-determined approach causes her to misinterpret the Trustees' actions. She fails to understand why such actions might have been deemed necessary or what the cultural environment was like in 1912 Sydney.

Vaucluse House's first Trustees were not museum men, and initially did not recognize the possible uses to which Vaucluse House could be put, but conversely they were not unaware of the house's historical associations. In the same year that the convict barracks were demolished, the Trustees were writing to the head librarian of the Mitchell Library in order to obtain 'as far as possible authentic information with regard the age of the old house and its associations as regards the occupation by the late William Charles Wentworth.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 21) Pomfrett's belief that the demolition of the convict barracks and workers' cottages is evidence that 'the earliest Trustees virtually ignored the historic significance of the house' and were preoccupied only with 'the creation of a recreational facility' (Pomfrett 1994, 162) not only ignores the Trustees' attempt

to link a great man with the site; it fails to acknowledge the structural maintenance the Trustees undertook using salvaged material; and it does not take into account the dire financial situation the Trustees were in about 1912: 'Letter was read from the Director of Public Works ... stating that Department does not purpose making provision for the maintenance & upkeep of Vaucluse House and grounds in the future.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 25) Pomfrett's interpretation also fails to recognize that in 1912 convicts and labourers were barely afforded historical study. The scholarly approach of the day was to focus upon individuals who had achieved great things, i.e. biographical or monumental history. Vaucluse House was a grand structure, and at least two important, early colonists were associated with it; in the 1912 view, the convict barracks and workers' cottages were neither historically important nor structurally interesting.

Vaucluse House's rescue and conversion to museum status was opportune, but for too long now the myth that the early Trustees did not comprehend the house's significance has meant their achievements have been ignored. And while the Trustees' action on the structure of the house and grounds and their promotion of Wentworth's significance may make late twentieth-century historians and heritage professionals shudder, it is irresponsible on our part to continue to judge their actions through social history-focused lenses.

In March 1912, the Trustees 'agreed to allow the Public access to the ground floor of the old House'. (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 12) This opening of the house signifies the first step on the road to transforming a dilapidated mansion into Australia's first house museum. At this time, the Vaucluse Park Trust was still preoccupied with managing a recreational park, and simply maintaining the fabric of the 'old House'. Concurrent with its opening to visitors was the Trust's request to the Mitchell Library, the major state historical library, for information regarding Wentworth's association with the house. Despite their recognition of this link, for the following few years Wentworth's association was not articulated to visitors. During this period, there was no furniture to show and the rooms were bare and dilapidated. Visitors were taken through the ground floor rooms and a guide stated the purpose of each space, highlighting notable

architectural features. This form of display at Vaucluse House may be referred to as naïve preservation.

There was obviously interest from the public in the 'old House' for in 1914 the Trust established formal visiting hours. At the same time it also decided that an illustrated history of the house be written to be 'sold to produce revenue to help in repairing & renovating same.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 32) These administrative decisions highlight the Trust's optimistic expectation of a popular demand. The Minutes recorded by the Trust provide evidence that it was concerned about Vaucluse House's physical structure and how it should be made available for public view. The constant struggle for funding constrained the Trust's activities, but it is apparent that once regular hours were decided upon and small amounts of money were collected, the Trustees were able to embark on programs beyond simple maintenance.

The Mitchell Library's response to the Trust's request for information produced material of 'a voluminous & very interesting nature' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 23), which was perused and condensed by Trustee Mr Duncan. A continuing dialogue with the Australian Historical Society also contributed to the Trustees' understanding of Wentworth's associations. Suggestions made by the Australian Historical Society's Captain Watson were to have a long lasting influence upon the interpretation and presentation policy pursued at Vaucluse House.

Captain James Henry Watson was a retired businessman and a keen amateur historian who pioneered the study of Australian history. (Ritchie 1990, 399-400) Not only was Captain Watson the honorary research secretary of the (Royal<sup>5</sup>) Australian Historical Society from 1915-1932, he also held the position of president three times. Among his research interests were Sir Henry Browne Hayes' associations with Vaucluse Estate; the etymology of the property's name; and Wentworth himself. Watson's study of Wentworth concentrated on his

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<sup>5</sup> In 1918 the Society was granted permission to attach this prefix to its name.

association with Vaucluse House and his influential role in the early political life of the colony. For Watson, Wentworth's importance lay in the role he played as drafter of the NSW Constitution. And it was this facet of Wentworth's life that Watson emphasized in his communications with the Vaucluse Park Trustees. In fact, so influential was Watson that when he (with the backing of the AHS) suggested that the library at Vaucluse House be named the Constitution Room the Trustees accommodated his wishes: 'From Secretary Australian Historical Society re society's visit & thanking for having adopted the name "Constitution Room" & asking for acknowledgment of the origin.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 51)

The Trustees did acknowledge the origin of the phrase, emphasizing the importance of Wentworth's contribution to Australian self-government. In so doing they began the process of transforming the achievements of this man from pioneer colonist to great statesman, father of Australian constitutional government. This role was stressed not only in the presentation of the library as the Constitution Room, but also in the speech given on the conducted tours:

Wentworth fought and obtained for New South Wales the rights and liberties which we to-day enjoy and in the Constitution Room, which I will show you later, the constitution was drafted. ... CONSTITUTION ROOM. This was Wentworth's Library, it was here the old time patriots and statesmen forgathered to petition the English Government to grant them redress of their grievances and responsible Government. In this room the Constitution Act which gives New South Wales responsible Government was drafted and the Trustees therefore decided to re-name it, and it is now known as "The Constitution Room". Besides fighting for and obtaining Responsible Government Wentworth was also mainly instrumental in obtaining "Trial by Jury", "The Liberty of the Press", "Adult Suffrage". He was the founder of the Sydney University where his statue may be seen. He was also Australia's first Immigration Agent, the first man to foreshadow a "Federated Australia" and, as you know, in addition to the above he was an explorer, barrister and poet. No name figures larger in

Australian history than that of Wentworth. There is no house in Australia with such historic associations as Vaucluse House and the Constitution Room we are now in is the most historic of all the rooms therein. (VH Archives: VH Supplementary Data 1910-1968)

This hearty tribute to the foundation hero demonstrates the making of a creation myth and its specific location within a physical space. The deliberately named space, the Constitution Room, assumed the *numen* of Wentworth's life and achievements. Taking visitors into this room at the end of their tour and emphasizing Wentworth's great accomplishments served to encourage reverence. Wentworth's heroic acts are further stressed in the presentation of the room: 'the table on which Wentworth was said to have written the Constitution, and the desk set with which he is said to have written it, have been set aside deliberately ... and displayed within a glass case. ... The very specialness of these objects was physically delineated by barriers and the removal from the everyday life of the house and the viewer.' (Bravery 1994 a., 67)

In the first decade of Vaucluse House's life as a museum, the Trustees continued to highlight its historical importance. This is demonstrated in their management policies and publications. In 1914 the first sub-committee was appointed; its remit was 'to go into the question of writing up a history of the House and preparing a pamphlet for publication & printing postcards.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 32) The role of a sub-committee created in 1915 was 'to deal with all historical documents & relics received by the Trustees & also to take steps to form a museum for Australian Historical records & objects at Vaucluse House.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 56) The publication of pamphlets and the focused attention on collecting historical documentation dominates the Trustees' minute books. The rationale behind these policies is two-fold: to promote Wentworth's greatness and identify Vaucluse House as the site where he attained this stature; and to raise funds so the Trust could continue to promote Wentworth by collecting and displaying artefacts that belonged to him, thus providing physical evidence of his life and thereby accentuating his *numen* in his home.

As raising funds was difficult, the Trust decided to invite the donation of 'Historical Records or Relics, if acceptable the name of the donor be shown on the article accepted.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 82) This decision led to a deluge of furniture and objects that had no direct relationship to Wentworth or his family. From the early 1920s this policy came to obscure the Trustees' objectives, but at the time the decision was taken (1916) the Trustees were desperate for furniture and objects to display in the house. As well as asking Wentworth descendents for family objects, the Trustees contacted J.R. Lawson, auctioneer, whose firm had been responsible for the sale of household furnishings just a few years earlier (about 1901). It was hoped he might be able to provide 'information as to the disposal of the furniture sold by his firm from Vaucluse House, particularly that from the library used by Mr W.C. Wentworth when drafting the Constitution Bill.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 56) This avenue of research drew a blank, but the approach shows that the Trustees understood their role as stewards of Vaucluse House, and appreciated the need to fill the home with domestic objects, especially ones with direct provenance to Wentworth.

Finances in the early days of Vaucluse House's museum life were strained. Any money raised from the sale of publications, attendance fees or donations was spent on purchasing objects for display and maintaining the fabric of the building. There was little additional capital for major repairs though the Trustees were keen to undertake improvements to the house. In 1917 they had managed to accumulate sufficient funds to allow major structural changes to be made which required the closing of the museum for a few months. The timber skillion that had served as a bedroom during the Wentworth years was demolished, and a turret was constructed on the eastern wing of the house, thus presenting a symmetrical façade. This addition visibly endorsed early twentieth-century notions of grand living in colonial Australia. It is not known how Wentworth planned to complete Vaucluse House, extensions for which were halted in the 1840s due to economic depression. What we can infer from the Trustees' actions is their desire to finish his home for him, allowing the grand nature of Vaucluse House to dominate the



horizon as they dreamed it would have done had circumstances not conspired against Wentworth.<sup>6</sup>

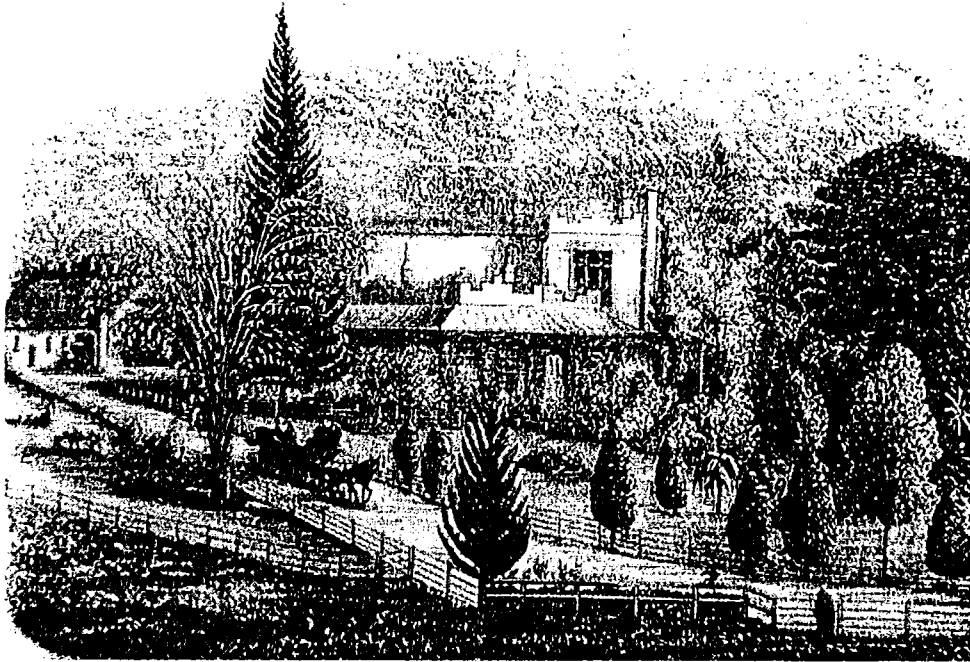


Illustration 7: A drawing of Vacluse House showing the single turreted façade before the 1917 remodelling (*Australian Town and Country Journal*, 10 May 1873)

Coinciding with the completion of these works came a management decision that confirmed an ongoing government commitment to Vacluse House. During the museum's early years, all decisions concerning the house had been made at Vacluse Park Trust meetings where the dominant focus of attention was administration and management of the recreational facility. In 1917 the Trust decided that a separate committee dealing specifically with the museum should be created. The Trustees, responsible to the NSW government, reported their proposal for the new museum committee to the Minister of Education, who in 1918 responded favourably to the suggestion. The Minister of Education then made provision for a Bill to be drafted providing a constitution for the new

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<sup>6</sup> The HHT has decided that the turret constructed in the 1917 restorations will be removed in the near future: 'The incomplete façade which the Historic Houses Trust intends to present would demonstrate the effect of economic conditions prevailing during the Wentworth occupancy and would be a physical sign of the difficulties of the 1840s depression.' (Pomfrett 1994, 164)

museum Trust, and an estimate to be prepared for 'putting the house in repair suitable for a museum'. (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 146)

Unfortunately no explicit museum policy followed this development, though Wentworth's historical association with Vaucluse House continued to dominate house activities, his role as constitution drafter an ongoing focus for promotion. This is demonstrated by the introduction in 1918 of what were to become annual celebrations: 'Mr Duncan suggested the viability of holding a celebration at the Park on Wentworth's Birthday, 26<sup>th</sup> Oct. next, it was considered that a representative gathering of the Governor, the Premier, the Chief Justice (University Senate) Mr H.T. Braddon representing the commercial world & Dr Ward representing the Press should be invited & asked to deliver orations on the occasion.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 126) One proposed oration was 'Patriot Statesman – Father of Constitutional Government'. At these birthday celebrations, twentieth-century leaders who, it was believed, owed their freedoms and way of life to the efforts of nineteenth-century patriots like Wentworth, could honour the heroic deeds of Australia's colonial statesmen.

This patriotic sentiment flourished in an atmosphere of burgeoning post-World War I national pride. In 1915, the Trustees had offered Vaucluse House for the use of convalescent soldiers. In 1920 a suggestion was made that Vaucluse House be given to the Commonwealth government for use as a war trophy museum. Post-World War I Australia experienced a swell of partisanship and a growing need to honour the heroic deeds of Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) soldiers in physical structures: the call for a national museum had actually been made in 1917 during the war. The Trustees' offer to transfer Vaucluse House from state to federal government ownership to become a national museum of commemoration indicates the Trust's conviction of the heroic, patriotic status of Vaucluse House's principal hero, Wentworth, and their belief that his *numen* would enhance the commemoration of the war. At the same time Vaucluse House was offered as a National War Museum the Trustees proposed that the House's name be changed to Constitution House, Vaucluse Park. The motion was accepted as the Trustees felt 'it would more closely associate the house with the historical events which

occurred therein during Wentworth's occupancy.' <sup>7</sup> (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 186)

By 1920 Vacluse House had been managed by the NSW state government for ten years. While conscious of Vacluse House's historical association with Australia's colonial and convict past, the Trustees had not articulated a policy of interpretation to accentuate these associations. In the second decade of government ownership, the need to emphasize these associations was more explicit: Wentworth's heroic status and ties with Vacluse House became the rationale for activity. Efforts to raise funds to acquire furnishings with Wentworth provenance continued. In 1921 the Trustees presented their priorities in the following wish list:

1. Restoration & putting of Vacluse House in good order
  2. Refurnishing Vacluse House with original furniture (if possible, if not with furniture of the Wentworth period)
  3. The establishment of a Historical Museum (Wentworth period)
  4. Construction of an amphitheatre in the back portion of the Park (on the lines of the Grecian Theatres)
  5. Improving the grounds with relics & monuments connecting Australian History & Ideals.
- (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 222)

This policy shows that the Vacluse Park Trustees were committed to interpreting Vacluse House as a tribute to the memory of Wentworth by stressing his *numen* within the house and through the display of provenanced furniture. However the presentation of Wentworth was not the limit of the Trustees' imaginations. The last two points of the policy do not directly contribute to the interpretation of Wentworth, but they provide an insight into cultural trends. Point four, the construction of an amphitheatre, identifies a propensity among new nations to adopt classical architectural-styles to symbolize the principles of fair and

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<sup>7</sup> Due to the absence of the Premier at the time this change was proposed, the renaming of Vacluse House was postponed, forgotten and not raised again.

democratic governance. It is interesting to note that while the Vaucluse Park Trust was writing this policy, Lincoln's birthplace cabin was being enshrined in a Greek style temple, continuing the fashion for classical forms as memorials already established at the Lincoln and Washington Monuments. As for point five, it would be fascinating to know the dimensions of Australian history involved. Funds did not permit either of the latter points to be seriously considered.

Fortuitously, Wentworth's grandson, another William Charles, contacted the Trustees as this document was being prepared offering 'to assist the trustees in obtaining & restoring the original furniture from Vaucluse House some of which he has & will hand over when the House is fit to receive it.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 235) Many incongruous and inaccurate pieces had been collected over the years. Now the Trustees' communications with Wentworth descendents and the promise of provenanced items allowed a more historically conscious approach to the telling of Wentworth's story.

In a review of Australian museums written in 1933, it was argued that a major hindrance to the development of history museums in early twentieth-century Australia, of which Vaucluse House was named as the principal example, was isolation from the international museum community. (Markham 1933, 21) Geographically Australia's early museum pioneers were indeed isolated, but they were not unaware of developments overseas. Throughout the nineteenth century, unique and unusual natural history specimens were sent back to Britain for exhibition in British museums, and similar collections were initiated in Australia: the first Australian museum (of natural history) having been established in 1828. Thus the concept of museums was not foreign to an Australian audience. What hampered the development of history museums in nineteenth-century Australia was the nation's avoidance of the tainted convict past and focus on the future: 'the past was significant only as a measure of how far the colonies had come.' (Webber 1986, 160) This perception changed with Australia's involvement in the First World War as asserted in this cable from the Secretary of Defence to AIF headquarters in 1918: 'Britain already has a history and traditions and relics and trophies extending back for centuries ... whereas Australia has none other than

what she draws from the mother country. A nation is built upon pride of race and now that Australia is making history of her own she requires every possible relic associated with this to help her educate her children in that national spirit thereby ensuring loyal adherence to and defence of the Empire of which she forms a part. (*Cable from Secretary of Defence to AIF headquarters*, 3.12.1918, AWM DRL 6673 621; qt in Webber 1986, 165-166) National celebrations to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of white settlement in 1938 emphasized Australia's unique history, encouraging calls for a museum of Australian history. Markham's assessment that geographical isolation was the reason for so few history museums fails to appreciate Australia's cultural development to that point. Vaucluse House and the Australian War Memorial (the other history collection mentioned in the report) should actually be credited with championing an interest in Australian history and national heroes. So too these museums' knowledge of comparable international institutions deserved to be recognized.

In 1921, the Trustees minute the actions of an American tourist who offered to take one of Vaucluse House's Pompeian tiles back to America to present it to the Trustees of George Washington's home, Mount Vernon. 'As the secretary thought it was an opportunity to open up correspondence with the famous American Home, he handed Mr Manley a tile to take back to America.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 243) The following year, in a specially produced frontispiece to K R Cramp's book *William Charles Wentworth of Vaucluse House*, an appeal to Australia's patriotic public was made by the Trustees:

The Trustees appeal for funds to restore and refurnish Vaucluse House that its historic associations as the residence of William Charles Wentworth, father of our constitution, be preserved for future generations as a memory and an inspiration. Americans have venerated Mt Vernon, home of George Washington, and Vaucluse House holds for us just as much sentimental significance and epochal glamour. For it was there that the Constitution Act, our Charters of Liberty, was framed. Love of country entails an appreciation of those patriots of the past, like Wentworth, that we may

have their example ever before us in future national undertakings. (Cramp 1922)

Here is evidence that the Vacluse Park Trustees were not only aware of Mount Vernon, but the great man model and civil religion ideology was also familiar to them. It was clearly fluent in the mind of contemporary commentators like Cramp, who trumpeted his faith of the sentiment of Great Man house museums thus:

As one wanders in the picturesque grounds, or lingers in the spacious rooms redolent with sacred memories, or contemplates the tiles once trod by feet of ancient Pompeian's, an overpowering recollection of bygone splendour and modern triumphs hallows the ground whereon one treads. (21)

Cramp's prophecy dominated the interpretive focus at Vacluse House from this period on. Vacluse House's rationale was now clearly articulated:

The historic home is destined to become the Mecca of Australian hero worship. (21)

### **1922 to 1955: 'A Monument of Pride to all Australians'**

Having determined Vacluse House's *raison d'être* the Trust set about establishing Wentworth's heroic stature in the public imagination. Over the next couple of decades the Trust combined fundraising and promotional activities. Trustees reasoned that contributing funds to the house's maintenance encouraged civic virtue and patriotic sentiment. The Trust endeavoured to educate the public to the benefits of civic pride through a series of events. It also lobbied politicians, likening activities at Vacluse House to those adopted by the model patriotic shrine, Mount Vernon.

Once the building and its surroundings have been thoroughly renovated the public will readily respond to our appeal to refurnish and maintain the old Home, the cradle of Australian National Life, as did the ladies of America with regard to Washington's old Home. Indeed, the Women's

Reform league ... has already begun work of raising funds for this purpose. (VH Archives: VH Supplementary Data 1910-1968, Letter from Duncan to Bruntnell 14.6.1922)

The Trustees took their civic responsibilities seriously, their intent clearly expressed in this letter from Mr Duncan, the President of the Trust to Sir Joseph Carruthers, MLC:

The Trustees by every means in their power have educated the people of this country, especially the rising generation, to a knowledge of who Wentworth was, and the great work he did in laying the foundation of the national life of this country. ... Wentworth and his Co Federates who in starting a Nation Building in Australia laid the foundation of all our greatness ... such men as Wentworth paved the way for the future prosperity of the statesmen of Australia ... and people should know these things. It establishes a love of country and love of country is of the utmost value to the welfare of any nation, however small ... Vaucluse House ... SHOULD BE – A MONUMENT OF PRIDE TO ALL AUSTRALIANS. ... [thus we must] not allow the property of such historic value to pass into ruin ... [but] provide a means to further educating the people, particularly the rising generation, to a knowledge of the history, political and social, of their native land. (VH Archives: VH Supplementary Data 1910-1968, 8.6.1922)

In a post-war environment where pride in the nation and pride in heroic actions flourished, acknowledging the men who 'laid the foundations' became a means to link their heroism with modern day Australians.

Educating the young of Australia in civic responsibility was a dominant focus of the Trust in the early 1920s. In 1923, it proposed all school children donate two pence to Vaucluse House. This proposition served two purposes: it ensured funds for the ongoing preservation of Vaucluse House, and it alerted Australia's youth to Wentworth's national importance. A similar scheme was suggested at Monticello just three years later. (Chapter 4) While the Minister of Education did

not approve the scheme, its suggestion was interesting. It shows that the Trustees considered patriotic education a primary objective of maintaining the house. By targeting Australia's youth, they would ensure that the heroic narratives surrounding Wentworth's achievements would become part of a national consciousness.

Throughout the 1920s the Trustees continually campaigned for funds and furniture so that Vaucluse House could be presented in a manner that befitted their great man. Having ascertained that the public was prepared to donate furniture to the house but not money, in 1922 the Trust appealed for financial support from the Government, requesting £5000 for the restoration of the house. They were granted £8000 later that year. In 1924 Vaucluse House was still in poor condition. The Trustees decided to ask the Institute of Architects for advice on what immediate actions should be taken to prevent further decay. 'Sir Charles Rosenthal (President) Institute of Architects forwarding plans, specifications & estimate (£5000) for the restoration of Vaucluse House.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 338) This information was presented to the Minister of Lands who provided further funds for the house's restoration.

The use of specialists to argue the case for continuing government financial support to ensure Vaucluse House's accurate restoration and long-term survival marks a new, more professional era of management. The 1910s was the period in which the Trust focused upon the historical association of Wentworth to Vaucluse House for interpretive direction; the 1920s was the period in which they realized the importance of Vaucluse House's structural significance. The relationship that developed between the Institute of Architects and the Trust was based on an understanding in which in return for providing plans, advice, etc gratis, the Trust agreed to consult the Institute 'before any vital alterations, or material additions' were made. (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1912-1925, 358)

In January 1925 Vaucluse House closed for extensive renovations; it reopened more than eighteen months later, in August 1926. The restoration process had been slow, delayed in large part because of a shortage of funds midway through the project. The holdup contributed to a change of policy when the house reopened:



visitors were now charged entrance fees. It was hoped that money made from the visiting public and the sale of souvenirs would provide a continual maintenance fund. A copy of the 1925 “Inspection of the House” identifies work carried out during the extensive period of restoration. (VH Archives: VH Supplementary Data 1910-1968) The focus was mainly upon painting and room colours, and upon the addition of brass rods for picture rails. The only notable structural features mentioned were the spiral staircase, which was constructed in the eastern end of the hallway presumably to provide access to the recently completed turret, and the cedar cupboards which were to be preserved. Overcome with Vaucluse House’s public success after its reopening in 1926 the Trustees moved on to restoring the upstairs rooms. By 1928 the upper level was also available for public view.

As Vaucluse House’s physical structure received urgent attention, so too display of the collection was considered. A committee created during the restoration period decided the arrangement of furniture within the house. Despite the Trust’s conscious objective of collecting contemporary furnishings or objects with direct Wentworth provenance, a number of items that conformed to neither criterion entered the collection. This was especially noticeable in the upstairs rooms, as the Trust actively sought the donation of bedroom furniture so that these private living spaces could be presented according to their presumed usage. Photographs from the period allow us to view these rooms as they were presented to the visiting public from 1928. With subsequent research we know that the furniture was not contemporary with the period of Wentworth’s occupation, it was not correctly arranged, and room usages were not accurate.

Similar inaccuracies were evident downstairs too. The Trustees arranged furniture in rooms that were considered appropriate for their function: hence the absurdity that at one time the Dining Room walls were lined with three sideboards (as shown in historic photos). Throughout this period the interior displays became quite formal. The domestic living areas determined the type of furniture displayed – sideboards in the dining room, beds in the ‘bed rooms’ – while the drawing room became a display venue for period objects. Here donated and loaned Wentworth

family heirlooms were displayed in glass cabinets, lined up along the length of the wall, behind wooden barriers.

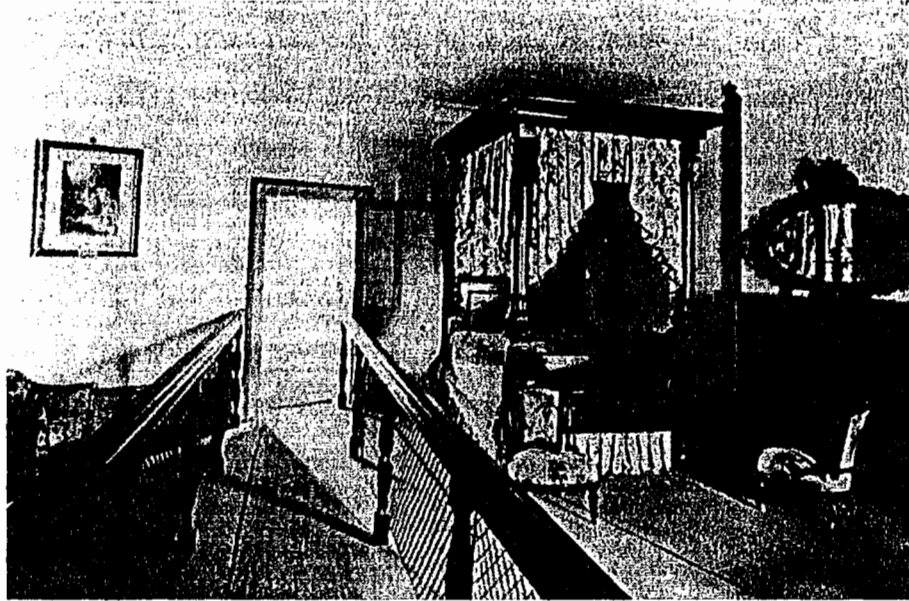


Illustration 8: This upper level room, used by the Wentworth's as a family sitting room, was erroneously presented as a bedroom  
(Photograph c. 1933 © Historic Houses Trust, NSW)

Vacluse House's interior display became a major activity of the Trust over the next three decades. Its efforts to refurnish the house were generally based on a few individuals' best judgment of what they deemed appropriate for presentation. 'The Trust is prepared as far as space will permit, to allow objects of historical interest to be exhibited therein but reserve to themselves the right of acceptance or rejection of objects for display.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1925-1933, 111) It was perceived that in their role as stewards of Vacluse House, the Trustees were best placed to determine what items of historical interest would contribute to perpetuating the memory of Wentworth. The Trustees now declined donations without Wentworth provenance, and some took an interest in the aesthetics of the interiors: 'Mr Robinson stated the appearance of the House would be greatly improved if the flooring boards were covered & suggested for a start that one room, the Long Room or Reception Room be covered with linoleum.' (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1925-1933, 244) The new attention to Vacluse House's interiors and opening up the domestic quarters for public view illustrates the Trust's recognition that Vacluse House would benefit from being presented

in a more domestic manner. To make the house appear more as a home than a museum of decorative objects, the private living spaces needed to be presented as such. But as these areas were incidental to the great man message, they were deemed not to require professional attention. Further, bedrooms and domestic living areas were perceived as the sphere of women, so responsibility for their presentation was transferred to ladies with 'experience and taste in matters of this kind.' (VH Archives: VH Supplementary Data 1910-1968, Oct. 1928)

Such sentiment marks a new trend in Vaucluse House's management. As public interest in the domestic interiors of Vaucluse House took hold, women became active in its museum activities. These women were not museum employees but wives of Trustees and museum staff. From the late 1920s to 1981 when the Historic Houses Trust assumed custodianship of Vaucluse House, these women were active in many housekeeping activities, principally concerned with the domestic or women's spheres of the house. Their involvement impacted greatly on the way such areas were presented. As overseers of the family sphere, these women were responsible for arranging furniture, choosing and making drapes or other soft furnishings, even choosing appropriate wallpapers and paint colours. In First and Miss Wentworth's Bedrooms for example, the wife of the caretaker, Mrs Taylor, was responsible for making the curtains and bed drapes and was also credited with the 'restoring and placing in position of the furniture.' (VH Archives: VH Supplementary Data 1910-1968, Oct. 1968)

The Trust's interpretive and display activities during this period were not underpinned by professional scholarship: it did not employ consultants for advice, and it had no articulated policy. Interpreting the Trustees' logic, we can see that the provenanced objects in the drawing room (echoing formal museum displays), were the physical relics of Wentworth's life. These objects assumed authority and as such were considered more important than the period rooms.

Professional consultants were called upon for matters concerning Vaucluse House's physical structure. Following the Institute of Architects' association with the Trust in the 1920s, the next professional to work on the house was Professor of Architecture at Sydney University, Leslie Wilkinson. In 1944 he was invited to

advise the Trust on interior paint colours. His successful collaboration with the Trust continued over the next few years. Realizing that the advice of a professional architect gave important prestige to activities at Vacluse House, in 1947 the Trustees discussed 'the question of appointing an Honorary Architect to advise the Trust on matters pertaining to Vacluse House, etc.'. (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1941-1950, 146) The new reliance on professional advice for architectural matters shows that maintaining the physical structure of the house required training and was therefore beyond the ken of the Trustees. However displaying objects within the interiors, especially if they were provenanced or contemporary to the house, simply required an aesthetic sense and an understanding of domestic spaces, skills the Trustees simply assumed they possessed. If questions of historical accuracy were raised, the Trustees readily addressed them, but in the 1940s, room arrangements were viewed as too trivial for historical research. The connection of women to authority on trivial topics is significant!

Evolution of display at Vacluse House from the 1920s to the mid-1950s shows that the Trustees were unsure how to translate their intent – to educate the Australian public in the patriotic ideals as handed down by the great man Wentworth – through physical interpretation. Publicity material, printed matter, tour scripts, organized celebratory events and Trustees' minutes indicate the glorification of Wentworth and his role as patriot and nation builder was still their focus. It was through these programs that the Trustees managed to spread their message.

The Wentworth October birthday celebration continued throughout this period except for 1932, when it was cancelled due to poor finances. In the spring, opening hours were extended so that increasing numbers of visitors who came for the wisteria display could be catered for. Advertisements were placed in newspapers and tourist bureau brochures. Celebratory pageants were held on the Vacluse Estate grounds. One in 1932 coincided with the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge; another in 1938 celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of white settlement in Australia. The Sesquicentennial celebration was recorded on the film

*March to Nationhood*. The text that overlaid the footage identified Vaucluse House as the home of one of Australia's Founding Fathers, and provided a nostalgic view of life in colonial Australia. The message of the spiel is that Australians today owe their freedoms and unique culture to patriots like Wentworth, who were stoic in the face of adversity.

Vaucluse House, Sydney, formerly the home of Australia's great statesman William Charles Wentworth, is the lovely setting for an historical pageant depicting colonial society in Wentworth's day, enacted now by descendants of those early pioneers. The actual coaches of a century ago are used in a scene depicting the reception of guests by Mr and Mrs Wentworth. Many of the costumes are heirlooms of the period. Fashion plays its part in the history of nations, and this display of gallant men and women, who amid the hardships of a young colony, preserved the manners and customs and the civilised society of the motherland. Yet under the trappings of an old world they were already citizens of a new world. ... So Australia in 1938 looks back to the colourful days of the early colony, back to the splendid backdrop of a pioneering past. (qt in Thomas 1991, 137, 138)

### **1955 to 1981: 'A Period House Rather than an Exhibition Only to William Charles Wentworth'**

By the mid-1950s interest in the early decades of Australia's white history became more popular and romanticized. Vaucluse House, as a bastion of the colonial era, continued to attract publicity and public interest. In this environment, subtle but significant shifts in display occur and the first explicit reference to an interpretive goal is stated: 'It was moved by Mr Miller that the President be authorized to arrange for a suitable person to draw up a catalogue and make suggestions in regard to the interior arranging of the House. The Trustees confirmed their policy of keeping the House as a Period House rather than an exhibition only relating to William Charles Wentworth.' (VH Archives: NVPT Min. Book 1950-1958, 139)

The recording of this policy followed the publication of a scathing article in which the Trustees' activities at Vaucluse House had been questioned. Supported by a photograph of tattered curtains, the article "Shocking neglect at Vaucluse House: Filth, grime on art relics" addressed the decay and neglect on display at Vaucluse House, claiming such conditions dishonoured the memory of Wentworth, 'Australia's greatest statesman and patriot, "father of responsible government".' As the anonymous author stressed, such neglect must 'give pain to ... every Australian with any degree of national pride.' (1955, 22) He went on to question the Trustees' activities to date, identifying their intent to restore 'the dwelling as it was when Wentworth occupied it', but showing that their actions, beyond restoring the fabric of the building and recovering old family objects, have been 'apathetic': especially in regard to display and care of the collection. Concurring with the Royal Australian Historical Society, which had written to the Trust identifying errors in the description of certain exhibits, the author identifies his concerns:

Haphazard arrangement of exhibits, many of which are inadequately or incorrectly labeled, or lack description altogether. ... inclusion of inferior articles without historic, aesthetic, or intrinsic value. ... An almost incredible lack of discrimination is shown in the numerous worthless and commonplace items that have been added to the collection. (1955, 22)

This article indicates a turning point in the evolution of Vaucluse House's interpretation and display. The accusation of apathy is too harsh, though criticism of the display, including arrangement, condition and scope of the collection was justified. By the mid-1950s, the interiors of Vaucluse House were a mess; they were dirty and dilapidated, and full of eclectic objects of dubious provenance. The Trustees' realization that displays required attention was mirrored in their decision-making over the next few years, starting with their 1955 interpretation objectives. Wentworth was still important to the story of Vaucluse House, but instead of being identified as the venerated hero, he and his home became representative of life and style in colonial Australia. Wentworth's life came to symbolize the heroic achievements of all early pioneers. Thus his home became

evidence of colonial life. Two themes dominate Vaucluse House's presentation in the following two decades: interiors were interpreted as exemplars of colonial living (according to a mid twentieth-century understanding); while the collection of artefacts, evidence of colonial style, was exhibited in gallery spaces, located in the service rooms and outbuildings. Vaucluse House thus became a house museum and a museum of colonial mementoes rather than a pure and undiluted hero-worshipping site.

In 1957 the Trustees initiated a policy of de-accessioning items in the collection that lacked authenticity. (VH Archives: NVPT Min. Book 1950-1958, 208) This program coincided with the transformation of the former Housekeeper's room into a gallery for the display of colonial artefacts, while the Butler's room became a Period Costume Room in 1964. Responsibility for organizing the exhibitions in these new galleries was once again assigned to the Trustees' wives. Determining how the house should be displayed became a priority as colonial objects were moved from interior displays to specific gallery rooms: presenting Vaucluse as a familial, period home became the model. Every room in the house underwent a complete restoration between 1955 and 1965. A Miss Russo, hired by the Trust to advise on the interior decoration (VH Archives: NVPT Min. Book 1959-1964, 15) worked in close collaboration with Cobden Parkes, a Trustee and architect, whose opinions were sought on all structural and aesthetic decisions.

Together Russo and Parkes established an interpretation of a colonial aesthetic that was to influence many newly created house museums in Australia. Their interior decorating was based on ideas of good taste rather than historical evidence. The rationale appeared to be the provision of complementary backgrounds for the furniture on display, with white and cream dominating interiors during the 1950s and 1960s. Soft furnishings were still the domain of women associates. Mrs Weekes, Wentworth's granddaughter, had a close association with the Trust during this period. She offered to 'prepare covers and curtains in the bedrooms of Vaucluse House' (VH Archives: NVPT Min. Book 1959-1964, 15) which the Trustees agreed to. As a direct descendent of Wentworth, Mrs Weekes' association with Vaucluse House was greatly

appreciated. Not only was she encouraged to participate in furnishing the home, she was responsible for donating Wentworth-provenanced furniture to the collection, and her relationship with Vacluse House and the great man was frequently referred to in newspaper articles and radio interviews: 'Mrs A. Weekes had given a most interesting talk on Vacluse House over station 2CF on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> inst. and had paid a gracious compliment to the Trustees for their work in restoring the House and grounds to their former state.' (VH Archives: NVPT Min. Book 1959-1964, 142) Mrs Weekes' public support of the Trust gave credibility to their activities and validated their guardianship of this historic site. By the mid-1960s a colonial aesthetic designed to create the impression of grand, respectable, tasteful living was in place; the family rooms were more homely and the service rooms were utilized for exhibiting colonial mementoes.

Vacluse House was no longer exclusively a shrine to William Charles Wentworth but was now a fine example of colonial life. Wentworth had become a refined, colonial gentleman; his example of heroism became symbolic of all early pioneers and statesmen. Just one physical reminder of Wentworth's former heroic status remained: the Constitution Room. This room was restored in 1962, and the focus of interpretation was still firmly based upon veneration. The President 'had come across a quotation in Mr C. Bertie's Book [1921] which aptly described the Constitution room and he felt that a reference to this quotation could be placed in a prominent position in that room.' (VH Archives: NVPT Min. Book 1959-1964, 94) While the quotation is not transcribed in the minutes we can assume he was referring to this: 'His library at Vacluse House was at one and the same time the storm centre and the birthplace of thoughts that powerfully affected the life and destiny of Australia. His greatest act, the conferring of a Constitution on New South Wales, was probably designed and polished in the silence of this historic room.' (Bertie 1921, 17)

While Miss Russo's interior decorating did not rely on historical research but tasteful judgment, and Cobden Parkes' architectural advice was not based on architectural archaeology but on assumptions of contemporary practice, the period from the mid-1950s marks a recognition by the Trust of the need to



professionalize activities. Calling upon the expertise of consultants; de-accessioning non-Wentworth-period furniture and historically inaccurate objects; determining an interpretive model and aesthetic: these are all signs that the Trustees were more aware of modern museum practice. It was also a period in which the house museum field flourished in Australia, following the creation of National Trust branches in NSW, South Australia and Victoria. Dialogue and collaboration with fellow museum colleagues generated a valuable resource for professional development of the field.

The Trust's move away from patriotic hero worship and its growing understanding of museum practice were emphasized in a policy document drafted in 1973: 'Apart from maintenance, the emphasis at Vaucluse House is to be placed on its historic aspects and its educational value.' (VH Archives: NPWS Min. Book 1968-1981, 7) A complete architectural survey of Vaucluse House was also instigated, with architect Clive Lucas, 'an expert on the restoration of historical buildings' chosen for the job. (VH Archives: NPWS Min. Book 1968-1981, 116) Lucas' development of architectural archaeology as a means to determine interpretation at Vaucluse House had a huge impact both within the house museum field and the wider Australian heritage arena. No longer were house museums merely backdrops for the display of furniture and objects. Houses themselves became artefacts that if correctly interpreted could contribute to the chosen narrative. From the outset Lucas' involvement with Vaucluse House was professional and often controversial. He advised that the wrongs of previous administrations should be righted, using archaeological evidence to support his arguments. A brief analysis of one area altered during his early association with Vaucluse House, the kitchen, demonstrates his methodology and the evolution of contemporary conservation techniques.

In May 1974 the Trust's Secretary/Manager wrote a report in which proposals for the kitchen were made:

Removal of an area of cracked and "drumming" plaster has revealed that the chimney breast is made of the most beautiful dressed sandstone blocks. This leads the writer to believe that when originally built it was not

covered in plaster ... We also consider that the range at present in situ is not the original as the oven to the left of this, in what we think was a large open fireplace, has non-keyed in-filling of brick. Neither do we consider that the draught-screening wall is original. This is also built of plaster covered brick and is not keyed to the stone of the chimney breast. We feel that our opinions are logical on the grounds that Wentworth had a large family and a fairly substantial staff of servants and convict labourers all of whom would almost certainly have received cooked meals from the central kitchen. ... Dr Parkes has been consulted and he feels that we are probably right. Undoubtedly further research is required, but the writer would suggest that initially the Trustees should permit the removal of the existing plaster from the whole of the chimney breast and then consider removal of the existing range and demolition of the existing draught screen. (VH Archives: VHS Minutes 1973-1974, 138)

As Lucas was in the process of preparing a complete architectural study of Vaucluse House, the Trustees decided to wait until his report was ready before acting upon any of the Secretary/Manager's suggestions. The recommendations in Lucas' report to the newly created House Committee were probably the source of those of the Secretary/Manager, and were carried out between April and July 1975:

- (1) That the bricked up section of the fireplace be removed and the stove restored as we believe it to have been during W.C. Wentworth's occupation of the House.
- (2) That the draught screening wall be demolished, but that all bricks and tiles be carefully preserved and stored.
- (3) That a suitable mantleshelf be fixed in the position as revealed by recent examinations of the chimney breast.
- (4) That the stonework of the chimney breast be restored and repaired, the area above the mantleshelf being re-rendered and the area below being painted matt white so that the form of the stonework is not obscured.
- (5) That the matter of a hood above the mantleshelf be held in abeyance pending further research.
- (6) That action be taken on the water storage tank to the west of the chimney-breast

in accordance with advice to be sought from the Technological Museum.  
(VH Archives: NPWS Trustees Minutes 1968-1981, 175)

The process of reading the physical structure for evidence of change, and the acceptance that inference informed by educated guesswork was an appropriate base for action, mark the embryonic stage of conservation practice in Australia. Two decades later the logic employed in 1974/75 was deemed to have been incorrect. Lucas, still involved with the management of Vacluse House, revised his earlier views. In the light of new research and comparison with other sites, the draught screen was reinstalled.

This story shows that early forays into architectural archaeology were often a case of trial and error. As more archaeological research was undertaken, supported by evidence gathered from documentary resources, understanding developed and different conclusions suggested themselves.

As the analysis of physical evidence became more professional, so the roles of education and interpretation at Vacluse House were addressed. In December 1976, in line with the Trust's 1973 policy statement, an education officer was employed and a proposed list of duties considered. The variety and scope of publications available at the museum were also discussed. (VH Archives: NPWS Trustees' Minutes 1968-1981, 94) Since Vacluse House's translation to museum status, publications had been a principal educational tool enabling the Trust to convey its intended message. In 1976 it was decided that three types of publication were required to comprehensively cover the educative needs of all patrons: 'A cheap guide to enable visitors to get a quick appreciation of the background of the House and its present condition; A complete, unillustrated, and possibly unbound catalogue of furniture for the connoisseur; and A glossy, souvenir-type booklet with more detailed historical information, colour illustrations, and guide to the rooms with the principal items of furniture described.' (VH Archives: NPWS Trustees' Minutes 1968-1981, 116)

The focus of publications at Vacluse House in the 1970s was predominantly the display of furniture and objects admired for their aesthetic merit and historical

associations. The house, better understood thanks to ongoing research by an advisory committee set up by the Trust's government agency (the National Parks and Wildlife Service) also became a topic for discussion. Historical narratives provided a context in which the house and furniture could be better understood. The hierarchy of importance given to furniture, structure and narratives indicates that while the Trust's actions at Vaucluse House became more professional thanks to advances in conservation practice and architectural archaeology, developing educational policies and scholarly research, interpretation still centred on the tasteful lifestyle of a colonial gentleman.

Late in 1978 researchers uncovered an extract from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1853. This was the catalogue of the sale of furnishings, fittings and equipment from Vaucluse House that took place when the Wentworths moved to England. Presentation of this evidence to the Trust was significant. The information contained in the document shaped a revised interpretation of Vaucluse House's interior, and research undertaken based on this and other documentary evidence was to dominate the next two decades of Vaucluse House's evolution.

### **1980 to 2000: From Founding Father to Family Man**

In April 1980 a bill was passed by the NSW state legislature that resulted in the creation of the Historic Houses Trust (HHT). At this time the state government owned two house museums, Elizabeth Bay House and Vaucluse House, both administered by separate Trusts. The establishment of the HHT meant one body would administer the two museums, thus bringing 'cohesion and rationalism to the administration of all historic buildings.' (VH Archives: NPWS Trustees' Minutes 1968-1981, 19-20)

The effect upon Vaucluse House's administration was profound. The implementation of modern, professional methods of house museum management and conservation practice not only dramatically altered activities at Vaucluse House but also impacted greatly upon the wider museum sector, especially other heritage organizations. Even the National Trust, answerable to a vocal

membership, has adopted the principles of research and management advanced by the HHT. The methods employed by the HHT from the outset have been professional, influential and have contributed significantly to house museum practice in Australia.

At the time of the HHT's creation the social history paradigm was filtering through academic circles to museums. Thus the HHT's activities, policies, and underlying philosophy have been scrutinized according to contemporary academic debate and a substantial number of commentators have recorded their findings. (Bickford 1981; Bravery 1994 a, 1994 b; Liston 1988; McClean 1998; Pomfrett 1994; Tanner 1984; Temple 1999; Toy 1985, 1987; Webber 1986; et al) These writings examined alongside the HHT minutes provide an image of activity since 1980, comprising research; writing and reassessing management policies; and developing advanced conservation research practice. The available documentation further illustrates how the actions, policies and philosophies adopted at Vaucluse House were adopted at other HHT sites. The HHT approach ensures that even though houses in its care may differ in style, historical significance and age, there is coherence in management, interpretation and education at all sites.

One of the first actions taken by the HHT at Vaucluse House was the decision to appoint a permanent curator. A curatorial consultant, James Broadbent, was hired to supervise the initial changes; the permanent curator, Ann Toy, started in February 1981. Broadbent and Toy made significant imprints upon developments at Vaucluse House. Broadbent, now senior curator of the HHT, has been instrumental in all restoration and refurnishing activities at Vaucluse House. Toy, as curator, took on the responsibility of adopting more professional museum techniques in the day-to-day running of the museum. Toy also oversaw a growing culture of research that underpinned all future programs.

The first major avenue of research undertaken by the HHT was a study of Vaucluse House's history, understood in 1980 to revolve around the patriotic hero:

The accent at all times had been on the profound historical importance of the House in the life and development of the Australian peoples. Since 1960 every effort had been made to give the House a warm “lived-in” atmosphere as a memorial to Wentworth and his family. Without Wentworth, Vaucluse House would just have been one of the many charming but architecturally unremarkable houses on the shores of Port Jackson. With Wentworth it became the cradle of a great nation. (VH Archives: HHT Minutes 1980-1981, 4)

In 1982 the HHT published two Policy Documents: *Vaucluse House – Statement of Significance* and *Vaucluse House Buildings – Statement of Significance. Conservation Policy*. In the first, the Trust identifies fourteen points that determine Vaucluse House’s significance. Of principal importance are Vaucluse House’s historical associations with important early colonists, including William Charles Wentworth and Sir Henry Browne Hayes. The fact that Vaucluse House was Australia’s first house museum and is regarded by many as a ‘shrine’ also contributes to the place’s significance. From a social history perspective, Vaucluse House allows the aspirations of a wealthy colonial family to be explored, alongside the social and political history of NSW in mid nineteenth-century Australia. The Conservation Policy proposes that ‘In general the interior and exterior of the house should be conserved to reflect the occupation of the Wentworth family in the nineteenth century, particularly the period from 1827-1853’ with ‘the domestic character of the complex ... emphasised.’ The objectives of the Conservation Policy are supported by the Acquisition Policy (released at the same time) which aims to ‘evoke an historically authentic and ‘living’ domestic environment not only through the choice of appropriate objects but also in the matter of their presentation ... to reflect the history of the Wentworth family’s occupation.’ (VH Archives: HHT 1982, 6)

When assessing the HHT’s policy statements, it is useful to consider a distinction between cultural and social significance as identified by Vaucluse House’s current curator, Suzanne Bravery. She states, ‘The house derives its cultural significance mainly from the political endeavours of its principal occupant, and its social

significance from the lives of the Wentworth family.’ (1994 a, 62) Implementation of the HHT’s policies shows that social significance as identified by Bravery – i.e. the history of the family and other domestic staff – are only afforded cursory acknowledgement in determining interpretation. Rather the political and early colonial associations continues to dominate the HHT’s understanding of Vaucluse House’s significance and interpretation. As Bravery affirms, ‘the interiors were viewed and interpreted as significant because of their Wentworth provenance.’ (1994 a, 63)

Since 1981 all programs at Vaucluse House have been undertaken within a social history framework. However according to Bravery’s distinction between social and cultural significance, a social history-determined interpretation should allow complementary histories to be included, notably women’s, convicts’, labourers’ and indigenous people’s. But in reality these voices are all but absent from current presentations. The Chairman’s claim that ‘decisions and ... interpretation of the house are based on sound historical evidence’ (VH Archives: HHT Chairman’s Report 1983) is of little value to the history of subordinate actors if they do not receive comparable research to that given to Wentworth and to the house itself. Ultimately, Wentworth the great man remains the rationale of Vaucluse House’s interpretation. Vaucluse House’s other inhabitants – Sarah Wentworth, the ten children, the servants, convicts, indigenous people and subsequent occupants – remain on the fringe.

Nonetheless social history has genuinely influenced the HHT’s activities in a more methodological way, through the Trust’s emphasis upon gathering evidence from documentary and archaeological sources. Results of this approach are presented to the public as evidence of the Trust’s commitment to historical fact and truth to structural constraints. When the Housekeeper’s room was restored in 1986 it was decided that ‘This room will be repainted in the same colour scheme as the schoolroom but it is intended that some of the archaeological evidence e.g. wall and joinery paint scrapes, exposed lathes and plaster will be left visible to assist the public’s understanding of the processes involved in restoration.’ (VH Archives: HHT Supplementary May 1986, 24) The fabric-focused presentation of

the Housekeeper's room is emphasized to visitors to Vaucluse House today. The choice of room for such interpretive treatment is not questioned – but it should be. For here is a room in which an important subordinate actor who contributed to the daily management of life at Vaucluse House during the Wentworth family's occupation spent her days. But the anonymous housekeeper is invisible aside from a set of keys and a daily account book. Should we deduce that these interim spaces between service area and family rooms are either too difficult to interpret, or not relevant to the interpretation of Vaucluse House as a grand, colonial, family home?

Within the principal rooms of Vaucluse House, a noticeable transformation in display became evident after the HHT assumed stewardship, the outcome of 'sound historical research'. The Drawing Room provides proof of this evolution. Illustrations 9 and 10 show the Drawing Room c. 1968-1981 and 1991.

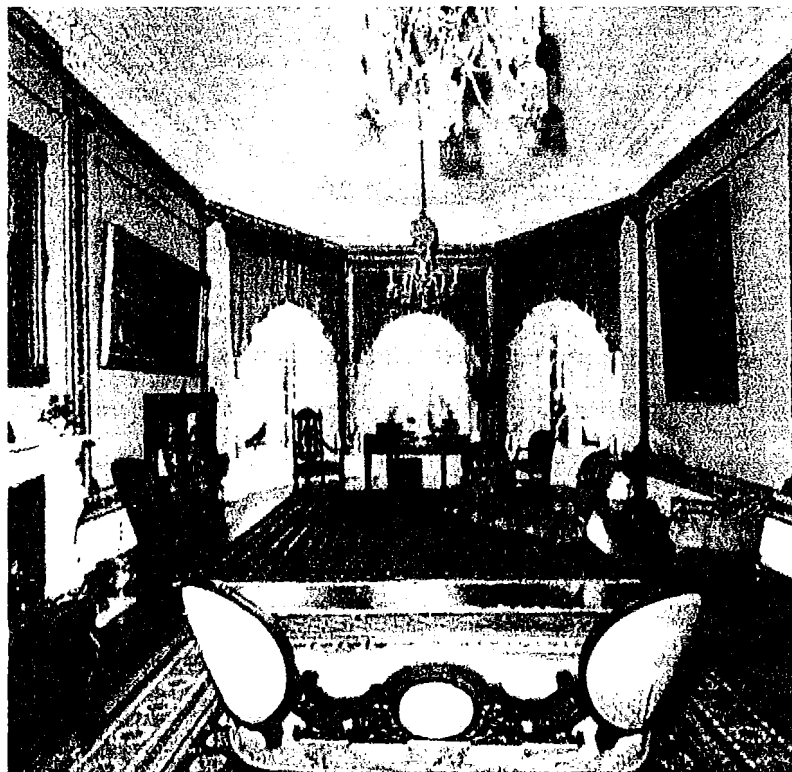


Illustration 9: Vaucluse House Drawing room as presented between 1968-1980; a grand, comfortable and plausible interpretation of mid nineteenth-century colonial living

(Photograph NPWS administration © HHT)



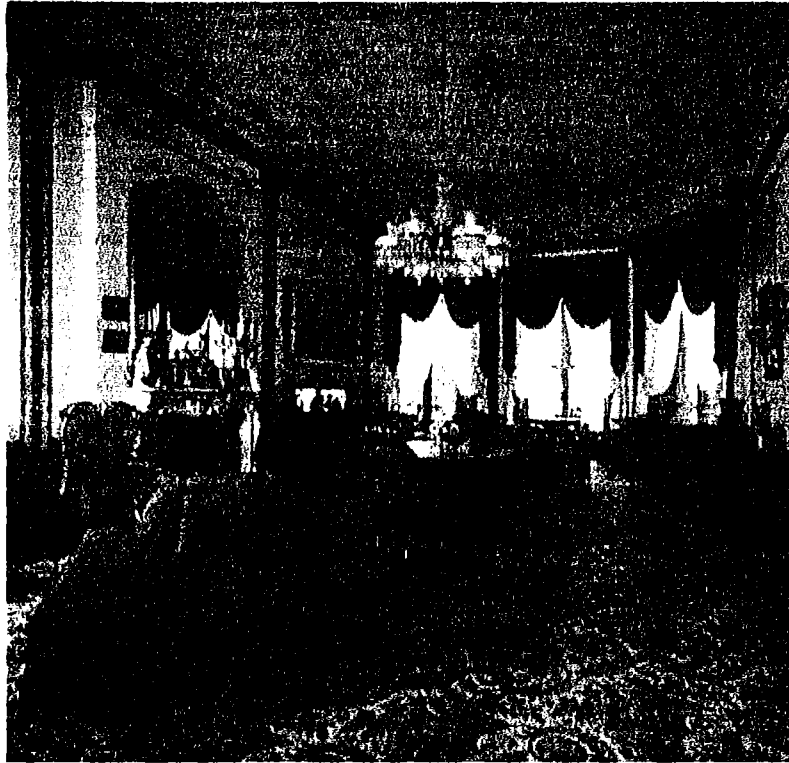


Illustration 10: Vacluse House Drawing room as presented by the HHT. We know this is a more accurate interpretation as it is based on rigorous research (Photograph c.1991 © Bill Anagrus)

Both displays present grand, comfortable and plausible interpretations of mid nineteenth-century colonial rooms. However we know that the HHT room is a more authentic reproduction. The Trust has recreated the Drawing Room interior using the 1853 auction inventory as its guide. Where originals could not be traced similar items were acquired or replicas made, and research into contemporary sources determined the current view of accurate furnishing and arrangement. All the main living areas of the house have been fashioned this way.

There is one exception, however: the Family History Room. About 1895 this room was used as a library; its use before this date, i.e. during Wentworth's occupation of Vacluse House, has not yet be ascertained. We know that in the early years of the museum, it became the Constitution Room on the recommendation of the AHS, and it remained interpreted in this manner until 1991 when the 'display was dismantled ... and the objects returned to other parts of the house to take on the same degree of importance as other tables and desk sets.' (Bravery 1994 a, 68). (This was after the room had been restored and

redecorated by the HHT in 1986.) Now the room is a gallery space, designated the Family History Room in which twelve panels are hung on the walls, covering a range of topics such as William Charles Wentworth 1790-1872; The Second Generation; Sarah Wentworth 1805-1880; Vaucluse House 1827-1853; Wentworth's Final Voyage 1873; and The Wentworth Family Tree.

Physical interpretation of Vaucluse House has altered visibly as a result of historical and architectural archaeological research. Other programs have also benefited from such critical study, especially publications and exhibitions. In 1988 to mark Australia's bicentenary of white settlement, the HHT was allocated state government funding to undertake two exhibitions, *Employees in Historic Houses* and *Women in Historic Houses*, with complementary publications. This was a public acknowledgement of house museums' subordinate actors, very much in line with a social history-determined agenda. Also at this time the Trust published a biography, *Sarah Wentworth, Mistress of Vaucluse*. This biography affirmed Sarah's prominent position at Vaucluse and has become a useful document for Vaucluse House's curator and other museum staff. Carol Liston, Sarah's biographer, writes (with some irony) that 'Her biography was intended to celebrate her associations – she shared the bed of Our Greatest Patriot, bore his children and lived in a house that is now a National Treasure.' (Liston 1988, 5) Sarah Wentworth, as with Vaucluse House, is significant because of her association with William Charles Wentworth! The current Vaucluse House guidebook is subtler: it interprets from Liston's research that Sarah was 'a remarkably practical head of the family who devoted much energy to mundane but essential matters such as stock raising and the productivity of their estates' and further, that 'Sarah's thorough, sensible management no doubt allowed her husband to pursue his political career without the energy-sapping distractions of domestic life.' (Bogle 1993, 12-13) Yet the official interpretation continues to gloss over Sarah's ex-convict status that haunted the Wentworths' public lives and forever excluded them from the 'pure merino' free settlers.

It is clear that some HHT staff practice the social history-inspired presentation of subordinate actors more than others, giving rise to an inconsistent front to HHT

motivations. The social history paradigm has challenged the validity of Vacluse House's great man status in a late twentieth-century environment, but not much. William Charles Wentworth's heroic status as constitution drafter and nation builder supported interpretation at Vacluse House from its inception: a grand-colonial home was transformed into 'a Mecca for Hero Worship'. But changing historiography challenged this simplistic view of one man's role in Australian history. The recognition of new histories demanded that museums address inconsistencies and unrepresentative aspects of their presentation. The response at Vacluse House has been to use historical research to validate all presentation or philosophical changes but not to follow through in interpretation. The process is thus irrefutable and gives an unintentional credibility to the still old-fashioned content.

What is the point of more socially inclusive historical study if in reality we see little shift in translation? In line with the conservation policy, Vacluse House today is presented as the genteel home of a well-to-do nineteenth-century Australian family. Sarah is not identified as manager of the estate, but rather as a companionable wife. Most of the ten children suffer from that house museum curse of being forever young; their bedrooms arranged as they would most likely have been in their infancy and childhood. And of course, the few remaining vestiges of the estate still function independently of visible ground staff.

On a guided tour, visitors have an opportunity to learn a little more about Vacluse House's characters. However these tours are informal and unstructured, and not taken by many visitors. Visitors are free to wander through the house at leisure: it is thus difficult to ascertain exactly what narratives the visitor absorbs and what information is missed. Whether visitors take a tour or wander through Vacluse House by themselves, the path they follow is determined by the location of the ticket sales area in the service wing at the back of the house. All visitors enter through the service areas, proceed to the kitchen-wing and the Housekeeper's room, cross the courtyard and enter the grand, formal rooms. Within the house the focus is upon colonial style and family life. In reality, the only avenue in which to learn more about Vacluse House's subordinate actors,

and therefore get a more comprehensive image of life in colonial Australia is through the organized education programs – not a means of interpretation open to many. What is frustrating about interpretation intent and outcomes at Vaucluse House is that contemporary commentators do not challenge inconsistencies. In fact they tend to praise the HHT's socially responsible activities:

The current interpretation of Vaucluse House also pays more attention to convicts and servants, particularly through an education program available to schools dealing with the service staff at Vaucluse. This increases recognition of the role of this section of colonial society and springs from a greater awareness of labour history. The hierarchy within the household and the daily routine of chores necessary to support the house, are also more readily indicated through the re-establishment of the rear service yard and original fenced boundaries, including stockyards and the enclosure of the area containing the front lawn and the pleasure garden, which was a private retreat for the exclusive use of the family. Similarly a great acknowledgement of marginalised groups means that for the first time in the history of Vaucluse House as a museum, Aboriginal involvement in the estate is addressed through recognition of their prior occupation and use of the site. An Aboriginal servant named Bobby who accompanied the Wentworth family to England is also represented. (Pomfrett 1994, 165)

From my experiences visiting Vaucluse House and examining archival material in detail, I believe Pomfrett's vision of a socially inclusive interpretation is misplaced. It is the HHT's intention that Vaucluse House provide a contextual background for discourse regarding social relationships, but the means through which it does so are not accessible to all. Sarah and the children are presented alongside William Charles so that now Vaucluse House is a family home rather than a shrine to one man. William Charles has become our common Australian ancestor, a symbol of colonial achievement and pioneering spirit.

At the end of the twentieth century the HHT can claim its research has resulted in the development of accurate displays and informed interpretation. The challenge

for the twenty-first century is to breathe life into their findings: to give the subordinate actors, including Sarah and the children, a voice beyond the classroom.



Illustration 11: The West entrance of Monticello  
(Photograph 1971 © Betts, E.M. & Perkins, H.B.)

## Chapter 4 Creation of a Genre: Monticello

### Introduction

Thomas Jefferson is recognized today as one of the United States' creation figures, a national hero whose achievements place him alongside George Washington and Abraham Lincoln: 'Washington the Moses-liberator figure, Jefferson the prophet, and Lincoln the theologian of the national faith' today present the holy trinity of American civil religion. (Pierard 1988, 51) However for many years Jefferson's achievements, and more pointedly his patriotic essence, were less than obvious to the American public. George Washington dominated public consciousness after his posthumous promotion to primal hero; in part assisted by the translation to museum status of his Revolutionary Headquarters in 1850 and his plantation home Mount Vernon in 1860. After the Civil War, a new generation of heroes was acknowledged and venerated, several at house museums that adopted the Mount Vernon model. (Chapter 2) Throughout this post-Civil War period, the achievements of Thomas Jefferson went largely unnoticed. Hosmer notes that 'those who wanted to save Monticello had to establish the place

of their hero in the American mind before they could successfully save the home itself.' (Hosmer 1965, 184-185) By and large this was true. It was the translation of Monticello into a house museum-shrine in 1923 that confirmed Thomas Jefferson's place in the holy trinity.

After Jefferson's death in 1826, Monticello along with most of its contents was sold to pay off debts. A few of the larger fittings remained, notably the seven-day clock in the entrance hall, and two large, gilt mirrors in the drawing room. A James Barclay purchased Monticello, establishing a silk farm on the property, which failed a few years later. In 1834 Commodore Uriah P. Levy (1792-1862), a passionate admirer of Jefferson's principles, in particular his views on religious tolerance, bought Monticello. Levy maintained the property and made it accessible to visitors: 'His farsighted conviction that the houses of great men should be preserved as "monuments to their glory" guided his family's efforts to safeguard the home.' (TJMF 1998, 5) An article published in *Harpers New Monthly Magazine* in 1853 reported wishfully that 'the elements may have changed the aspect of the exterior somewhat, but in general appearance it is the same as when Jefferson left. The interior, likewise, remains unchanged, except in furniture and other moveables.' (qt in TJMF 1998, 11-12) The fact that the new owners had not much altered the interiors ensured that the *numen* of Jefferson was not disturbed. In allowing the journalist access to Monticello, Levy kept Jefferson's name alive. The report illustrates a belief and a desire that Levy's custodianship of Monticello maintained continuity with the spirit of the home.

Throughout the mid nineteenth-century there was some sense of Monticello being a site worthy of pilgrimage. Records indicate that between 1858 and 1862 'pilgrims and scavengers, as many as ten thousand a year' were making their way to the mountaintop home. (Peterson 1960, 381) This interest coincides with the opening of Mount Vernon, the primary site for exponents of civil religion in mid nineteenth-century America. Pilgrimage to Monticello years before its translation to museum status also echoes the pre-museum status enjoyed by Mount Vernon. (Chapter 2)

The Levy family's faith in Jefferson and attachment to Monticello continued after Uriah Levy's death in 1862. Jefferson Monroe Levy (1852-1924), Uriah Levy's nephew, took title to Monticello in 1879. Uriah Levy had left Monticello 'to the people of the United States' (TJMF 1998, 12), but since he died during the Civil War the public mind and purse were otherwise occupied and his bequest was rejected. Instead Monticello was confiscated by the Confederate States of America and sold. Once the Civil War was over, Uriah Levy's heirs contested the confiscation and subsequent sale. Jefferson Levy eventually purchased Monticello and continued his uncle's policy of maintaining the house as a shrine to Jefferson, encouraging visitors who for a fee, contributed to charity, were permitted to tour the house and gardens.

It was the issue of access that eventually pushed Monticello's transition from private home to public museum. By the turn of the twentieth century popular sentiment acknowledged that Jefferson Levy was a good steward of Monticello, for Levy allowed public access to the plantation, but according to his terms. Ultimately Monticello was *his* home, not Jefferson's. Senator William Jennings Bryan wrote to Levy in 1897 asking if he would consider selling Monticello to the government, and if so at what price? (Hosmer 1965, 160) Levy replied that he was not interested in selling his home to the government or any other potential purchaser at this time.

The transformation from private residence to museum was ultimately the achievement of Maud Littleton, wife of Democratic Congressman Martin Littleton, who exploited the caprices of private ownership in her moralizing crusade to make Monticello public property. In 1911 she published the pamphlet "One Wish" calling for public ownership of Monticello, the following year she founded the Monticello Memorial Association. In rhetoric similar to that employed nearly a century later in the campaign to save the Hunt House (Chapter 2), Maud Littleton drew upon the public's knowledge of Anne Pamela Cunningham's rescue of Mount Vernon, arguing that the home of Jefferson, as one of the nation's quintessential Founding Fathers, should be accessible to all to visit: 'Is it only through Levy's favor that we can take our children up to the top of



that little mountain to teach them lessons in history?’ (Littleton, M (1912) *Monticello*; qt in West 1999, 100) Levy’s initial response to Littleton’s proposal was to dismiss it. He asserted his love for and right to title of Monticello in an article for the *New York Times*, “Will Not Surrender Jefferson’s Home”: ‘To preserve Monticello in accordance with its traditions has been the wish nearest my heart.’ (Levy 1912, 22) Levy addressed the crucial issue of public access, countering ‘the public has always had as free access to the estate as its safety and preservation would permit.’ In a jab at women’s preservation organizations he continued: ‘Public ownership, or quasi-public management, by managing dictresses, is still to prove its efficiency. At Monticello the atmosphere of the home of Jefferson is maintained, and a feeling of reverence for Jefferson is fostered. At Mount Vernon an admission fee is charged, and the home atmosphere has been lost.’ (Levy 1912) Levy considered his actions at Monticello entirely justified. His family had rescued Monticello and continued to maintain it; he allowed access to all; and unlike Mount Vernon, Monticello remained a home, little altered since Jefferson’s day, and thereby still nurturing the *numen* of the departed hero.

Littleton’s crusade took place in the public arena, in the United States Congress and in national newspapers. Her argument relied on the notion of ‘eminent domain’, the public right to remember the famous and great at significant sites, versus the right of the private landowner or individual. Her application to Congress in 1912 was narrowly defeated. Undeterred she continued to campaign, taking her proposals to the State of Virginia which in 1914 agreed private ownership hindered public access. With the Virginia State Legislature’s support, Littleton took the debate back to Congress, which resolved that Monticello was ‘the Mecca of all lovers of liberty’ and therefore the rightful property of the public. (United States House Committee on Rules. (1914). *Hearings on Purchase of Monticello*. 63<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 2d Session, on H.J. Res. 390 and 418, 23.2.1914. Washington, DC: Government Printing Offices; qt in West 1999, 105) During the congressional debates Democratic Secretary of State Bryan had been leaning on Levy, trying to convince him that the sale of Monticello would be a noble way ‘to commemorate the great Democratic administration of President Wilson’.

(Monticello Archives: S10 B110 Bear, “Levy wants Monticello as Home of Presidents”.) Levy finally agreed to the sale. However as with Uriah Levy’s bequest, war interfered with Monticello’s next transfer of ownership.

After World War I the federal government claimed its financial position did not enable it to consider purchase. As Levy had committed himself to selling Monticello to promote Jeffersonian democracy, he now actively sought suitable organizations to buy it on behalf of the people. A number of groups modelled loosely on the MVLA attempted to raise sufficient funds. Among them was a Richmond-based women’s group called the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association and in Washington, the National Monticello Association. These groups were individually unsuccessful at raising sufficient funds, so in 1923 they consolidated their activities with a third organization headed by Stuart Gibboney and Henry Alan Johnston, two Virginian, lawyers practicing in New York. (Peterson 1960, 385) The result was the birth of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation (TJMF), which successfully purchased Monticello on April 13<sup>th</sup> 1923.

### **1923 to 1955: 'Monticello is now a National Memorial and Patriotic Shrine'**

The *Certificate of Incorporation of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc.* lays out the rationale of the Foundation’s management of Monticello. The Foundation’s intent to heroize Jefferson by presenting Monticello to the public is clearly articulated:

- (a) To purchase, preserve and maintain Monticello, at Charlottesville, in the State of Virginia, as a national memorial, so that it may be forever retained as a national shrine, dedicated to the high ideals of democracy and reverently transmitted to future generations as a monument to the colossal and towering genius of Thomas Jefferson and a living and constant reminder of the immortal principles inscribed in the Declaration of Independence, and of the lofty patriotism which inspired his career.

(b) To foster and preserve the love and affection in which we hold dear the name and memory of Thomas Jefferson, in whom we behold our noble exemplar of democratic simplicity.

(c) To inculcate and demonstrate that sincere reverence for what is noblest in our past and which brings renewed inspiration for our ideals of American liberty so that Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, shall hold a place among the most sacred altars of our land together with the birthplace of Washington, the father of our Country, and the tomb of Lincoln, greatest of its emancipators. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S2 B5 Hildreth, 13.4.1923)

The civil religion of patriotism was now expressed in its newest temple.

Henry Johnston, a co-founder of the TJMF, expressed his personal understanding of the foundation's custodianship of Monticello in *The Story of The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation*:

Patriotic education has been the keynote of the campaign. The Governors resolved that this movement should at all times be a dynamic force in keeping alive those ideals, of which Thomas Jefferson was the life-long ardent champion — Civil Liberty, Religious Freedom and Universal Education for all the people. (Johnston 1926, 43)

The rhetoric of Johnston's story and the original Certificate of Incorporation demonstrate the enduring power of civil religion. Monticello as a national memorial and patriotic shrine would serve as a venue for patriotic pilgrimage alongside Mount Vernon and Lincoln's Birthplace Cabin.

The early campaigners had a difficult task ahead of them, for proponents of civil religion had largely ignored Jefferson. The sesquicentennial year of 1926 was coincidentally the centenary of Jefferson's death, and provided Jefferson devotees an opportunity to promote his patriotic stature. This same year, the TJMF emphasized its belief that 'Monticello was to be a Patriotic Shrine for the Children of America' by launching the "Pledge of Faith" campaign. Pledging their faith to

Jefferson and the ideals of the Declaration, schoolchildren across the nation were asked to donate their pennies to Monticello. (Peterson 1960, 385) Promoting Jefferson as an exponent of the patriotic principles of civil religion to the nation's schoolchildren was a public relations campaign with two objectives. The first was to raise one million dollars, half of which was required for the purchase of Monticello, the other half to establish the Endowment and Educational fund. The second was to align Jefferson's democratic ideals with the principles of the New Deal economic package of Franklin D. Roosevelt, a lifelong supporter of the TJMF and member of the Board of Governors from 1930-1945. The New Deal aimed to meet the needs of the United States in the Depression, yet it 'possessed a sense of tradition, a faith in democratic ideals, a set of symbols and conventions.' (Peterson 1960, 355) Supporters of Roosevelt, many of whom were founding members of the TJMF, sought to give a Jeffersonian face to the New Deal. Roosevelt himself wrote: 'we should celebrate him not as the founder and philosopher of the Democratic Party but as the supreme spirit of American liberalism and progress.' (Peterson 1960, 363)

Stuart Gibboney, the Foundation's first President, trumpeted patriotic education as the primary concern of the TJMF through the "Pledge of Faith" program. In his 1926 Report, Gibboney wrote:

The Foundation then, in accordance with the terms of its charter, initiated a campaign of patriotic education throughout the United States. This program was designed to awaken a wide-spread interest in the early history of the United States and its founders, to recall the important part played by Thomas Jefferson and to impress upon the people the importance of preserving Monticello as a National Memorial. This work has been carried on in a non-partisan and purely patriotic manner. ... The educational results have been gratifying. There has been manifested all over the United States a marked revival of interest in the life and work of Thomas Jefferson and the other founders of our Government. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S4 B23 FK, 25.9.1926)

Civic education was the principal rationale of the TJMF. Monticello was the medium through which its program was realized. From the outset the TJMF was not concerned with the physicality of Monticello, rather with its perceived *numen*. The TJMF had to reconcile itself to a number of dilemmas: was Monticello a house or a home, a museum or a memorial? Could its political ideals and patriotic message transcend everyday management issues? The practical issues associated with managing a museum seemed to sit uncomfortably beside the TJMF's inspirational ideas and patriotic rationale. Gibboney summarized Monticello's import to the TJMF's mission thus:

To make of Monticello merely a museum or interesting relic or monument, would not be true to the spirit of Thomas Jefferson. His home, and the Foundation preserving it, must at all times carry to the American people an inspiration and a better knowledge of the fundamental institutions of our country which would inculcate in future generations a deep devotion worthy of this proud heritage. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S4 B23 FK, 25.9.1926)

In the formative first decade of the TJMF's stewardship of Monticello, the patriotic, unpartisan nature of Jefferson's achievements was emphasized both to raise Jefferson's profile and attract funds. The Democratic government of Roosevelt aligned itself closely with the ideals of Jefferson. However the Foundation, as a private organization, was keen to maintain a distance from association with either political party, lest such support interfere with the ultimate aim of venerating their hero. The Foundation's members did not welcome Roosevelt's hope that Monticello might one day be owned by the federal government and administered by the National Park Service. Its overwhelming concern was expressed most succinctly by Johnston, who wrote 'if Monticello is owned by the Fed. Govt. it can be made a sounding board for the administration's interpretation or even distortion of Jefferson's philosophy.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF SI B1 Johnston, 14.3.1945)

The realities of managing a heritage site gradually impinged on the purposes of the Foundation. In the early years, the TJMF's activities to raise Jefferson's public

profile and attract funds dominated the public and the Foundation's consciousness. However in the 1930s this emphasis shifted: now Monticello with its relics and evidence of Jefferson's domestic life took precedence over Jefferson's political philosophy in the actions of the Foundation.

This change represents a shift from the civic improvement campaign to the presentation of the house itself as a shrine and focus of patriotic pilgrimage. The man principally responsible for this development was Sidney Fiske Kimball, Chairman of the Monticello Restoration Committee from 1924 to 1955. Kimball adopted the principles of the Great Man house museum model. He viewed Monticello and its furnishings as relics of Jefferson's life imbued with his *numen*, thus embodying patriotic ideals. Using professional museum practice to determine display and the acquisition of objects, Kimball intended to interpret these ideals.

In 1924 when Kimball first became involved with the TJMF, he was Chairman of the Committee on Preservation of Historic Monuments and Scenic Beauties of the American Institute of Architects and he was a teaching architecture in New York. In 1925 he became the Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Kimball's remit for the management of Monticello was to restore it as nearly as possible to its condition when Jefferson lived there. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S4 B21 FK, 30.3.1925) Although his background was in architecture and architectural history, Kimball was acutely aware that it was Jefferson's association to the house that gave it significance. Jefferson's plans for the house and grounds, his letters, visitors' accounts, et al underpinned all restoration activities at Monticello from the outset. This reliance on documentary evidence, especially Jefferson's own records, enabled Kimball to argue that the presentation at Monticello was an *accurate* interpretation of Jefferson's domain. Kimball also oversaw the initial restoration of the garden; here too the rationale for restoration was determined by evidence: the 'original designs for the planting in Jefferson's day are still in existence and will be scrupulously followed.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S4 B21 FK, 15.1.1925)

A number of people served with Kimball on the Restoration Committee over the years. Some of the more significant contributors were R.T. Haines Halsey,

Chairman of the Committee on American Decorative Art of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; Dr Charles Moore, Chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts of Washington, DC; and Dr Edwin Betts, of the Biology Department at the University of Virginia. Reading through the TJMF's extensive archives, it is apparent that Kimball assumed a hands-on approach to projects. Frequently his colleagues were called upon for advice, but ultimately Kimball made executive decisions which he believed were justified thanks to the extensive documentary evidence. Kimball was certain his involvement in the restoration project was vital: 'for lack of it things may be done wrong.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S4 B21 FK, 9.2.1927) Kimball's arrogance sometimes riled his fellow Committee members who felt he assumed too much from the evidence, and made decisions rashly:

I might say I have never been asked for suggestions until all of the plans had been formulated. This I think is an unhealthy condition. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S4 B23 FK, Betts to Kimball 23.1.1955)

Surely you do not intend to go ahead with adding these appendages without having a meeting of the Restoration Committee so that all evidences may be presented. To do so would be to abolish the value of the Committee. (Monticello Archives: TJMF SI B1 Johnston, Betts to Kimball 29.1.1955)

What Kimball achieved as Chair of the Restoration Committee was remarkable. Arrogance and contemporary resentment aside, it is clear that without Kimball, Monticello would have been a very different type of museum, and while he took flack from both his colleagues and the visiting public, he was undeterred in his mission. Much of the criticism he incurred was a direct response to his novel collections policy. For as early as 1924, Kimball dictated that only securely Jefferson-provenanced pieces should be collected and displayed in the rooms of

Monticello.<sup>8</sup> After meeting with Jefferson descendents in 1926, Kimball determined that 'enough of the original furnishings can be ultimately recovered to make it unwise to accept donations of furniture of the period, which have no connection to the house.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S4 B16 FK, 12.1.1926) Thus Kimball was able to abate the TJMF's concerns that such a policy was justifiable, once again claiming the credibility of documentary evidence to support his activities.

The explicit collection policy and absolute reliance on documentary evidence make Kimball a pioneer in the museum profession, especially regarding the house museum movement. His expert approach to Monticello's presentation parallels the philosophy expressed by the museum commentator, Coleman: 'a partially filled house - or even an empty one - can be made interesting to visitors. It is much better to have incomplete furnishings that are right as far as they go than to show an abundance of poor material. The fear of empty space has caused many an error.' (Coleman 1933, 65) This philosophy had not been well tested at the Great Man house museums that Monticello initially emulated. The Mount Vernon model still predominantly shaped the American public and professional understanding of house museums as patriotic shrines, especially as far as interior spaces were concerned. Most house museum visitors came to expect an interpretation inspired by domestic religion, whereby the moralizing message was provided through comfortable, colonial interiors. Monticello in no way provided such a comforting image. Kimball argued that no matter how bleak the interiors might appear, they were accurately furnished and not therefore an interpretation of Jefferson's style. It is not surprising he clashed so frequently with the visiting public and his colleague Halsey.

The archives are full of their criticisms:

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<sup>8</sup> Policy: 'The Restoration Committee has followed the policy of placing at Monticello nothing but genuine furnishings and relics rather than furnishings that were generally current in that particular period.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S10 B58 Bear, 13.4.1938)



As I see your problem it is to get the house furnished up as soon as possible. As the real Jefferson articles come to you they can replace those previously installed for the purpose of furnishing. There is a good deal of complaint in the neighborhood of Charlottesville that nothing is being done to make the house look livable. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S4 B16 FK, Halsey 12.1.1926)

Your restoration committee of experts, and your furnishings experts, may be “too close to the woods to see the trees” in this case, and may have spent large sums of money well, without that sense of ministering to a comfortable, home-like, and non-museum-like atmosphere which any good committee of ladies, American housewives, could and would give to it, as they have done at Mount Vernon, and this at a comparatively trifling additional expense. ... The place made me uncomfortable and depresses. I speak mainly of trifles. For example, that awful cheap plumber’s rail around Jefferson’s bed, instead of silk cord. And a fine coverlet in a museum-case, instead of on the bed. And the floors unpolished. And no attempt to set out the furnishings in an un-museum like way. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S6 B32 Gibboney, 14.12.1940)

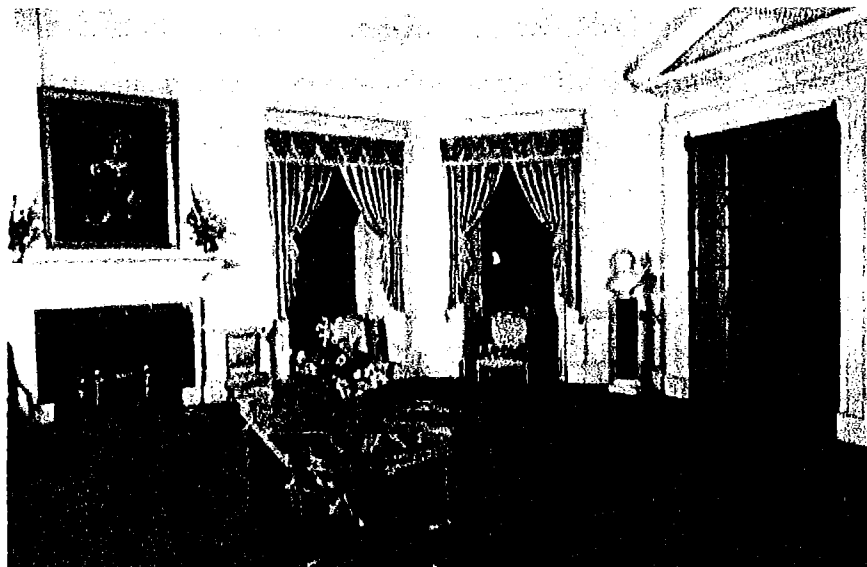


Illustration 12: The parlor may have been sparsely furnished in the early years, but this illustration shows Kimball's intent to present a homely interior  
(© Manuscripts Print Collection, Alderman Library, UVA)

... witness the recent unbridled attacks on the restoration of Jefferson's curtains, although we had posted his own drawings and his statement of the colors and materials to be used. Indeed, I think it is fair to say that everything the Foundation has done at Monticello has been the subject of constant local opposition for the good ladies. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S3 B11 Houston, 15.11.1949)

The interior gave the appearance of being almost "dilapidated". (Monticello Archives: TJMF S3 B12 Houston, 9.9.1949)

The public response, conditioned by the well-established, cozily domestic model as evident at Mount Vernon and many other Great Man house museums, is understandable. What is more fascinating is the response from Halsey, a colleague and fellow specialist in American furniture and domestic interiors. Halsey, the creator of the American Wing which opened in 1924 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Pilgrim 1978, 13), was involved in the promotion of Colonial Revival as an interpretive style in house museums, historic sites, international fairs and private housing. Colonial Revival had its roots in domestic religion: it 'existed to demonstrate that the domesticity of the eighteenth century was worthy of ... veneration.' (Conn 1998, 241) Colonial Revival embodied an early twentieth-century understanding of genteel living in pre-Revolutionary days. It was not supported by documentary evidence as espoused by Kimball, but relied on notions of connoisseurship and a desire to present interiors as comfortable, ordered living spaces. Given the popularity Colonial Revival enjoyed in the 1920s and 1930s, it is unsurprising that Halsey believed Monticello would benefit if presented according to its standards.

Kimball staunchly defended his policy, and remarkably, the TJMF stood by him in the face of such public criticism. In large part this was due to very poor finances – the mortgage was not paid off until 1940 – which curtailed activities at Monticello. Kimball's determination and the TJMF's insufficient funds resulted in slow but considered progress at Monticello. The house's interiors and the garden dominated 1920s-30s restoration activity. By 1938 attention turned to more

structural concerns with the rebuilding of the northwest dependency. The southeast dependency and South Pavilion were restored in 1941.

In 1944 Marie Kimball, Sydney Fiske Kimball's wife, was appointed as Monticello's first curator. She was an acknowledged scholar in her own right whose contributions to Monticello's interior presentation complemented her husband's and the TJMF's objectives. She adhered to Kimball's policies, relaxing them slightly in 1946 by allowing non-Jefferson owned furniture into the collection when originals were not available. Marie Kimball's appointment signals a subtle shift in focus at Monticello: during her tenure a more homely environment was created. In part this can be attributed to the appointment of a curator whose sole responsibility was interpreting the house, but it also corresponds to the period when the TJMF at last had surplus funds.

In 1940 two proposals presented by Kimball preempted the subtle changes that marked Marie Kimball's tenure. The first is reference to a 'museum or relic room – for exhibition cases ... will never look really suitable in the rooms in the house.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S4 B23 FK, 9.11.1940) The second is Kimball's idea to create a library 'to reconstitute Jefferson's own library of 14,000 books by purchase of other copies in the market.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S4 B23 FK 9.11.1940) In 1942, just one year after the southeast dependency was reconstructed, the kitchen at Monticello was 'restored and stocked with utensils as per Jefferson's own inventory.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S4 B23 FK) An article in the *New York Times* assesses the activities and proposed improvements at Monticello:

Under the direction of Mr Fiske Kimball, the most sympathetic and learned scholar in Jeffersonian draftsmanship and architecture, the interior and exterior have been restored, the old trees have been doctored to good health, the gardens made beautiful according to Jefferson's plans and drawings. The work of restoring the south terrace is still going on. It is gratifying to find that in 1940 more than 100,000 visitors paid an admission fee.

The preservation and recovery of this beautiful historic house and estate are a memorable work of patriotism and public spirit. The mortgage paid off, the Foundation will be able “in a few years to restore all of the buildings and grounds so that Monticello will be as it was when Thomas Jefferson lived there”. Not Virginia alone but the whole country is enriched by this pious care. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S4 B23 FK, 2.3.1941)

Peterson judges the focus of the TJMF to have shifted from Jefferson to Monticello around 1930. (1960, 387) Perhaps this is a little early, but it is certainly true that the initial concern of the Foundation was Thomas Jefferson and interpreting Monticello as a home was a secondary consideration. Kimball’s involvement from the outset ensured that the house and grounds were not ignored, but until finances were available his efforts were constrained: in 1932 the TJMF’s financial state meant very little provenanced furniture was in the house, restoration work was insufficient, and the property was almost foreclosed.

By the 1940s, Monticello had secured its place on the civil religion pilgrimage route: ‘Monuments of this type will have a large influence toward the preservation of the traditions of this country and thereby help to produce a right direction for the readjustment of this very much mixed world.’ (Monticello Archives: TJMF SI B1 Johnston, 25.8.1944) The symbiosis of Jefferson, hero of democratic principles, and his home Monticello, a Palladian-style plantation of his own genius, secured this position. ‘With the great number of pilgrims who visit Monticello each year it can no longer be considered a private home but truly a National Shrine.’ (Monticello Archives: TJMF S3 B12 Houston, 13.6.1950)

Throughout the 1940s to 1955 interpretation at Monticello focused upon Jefferson himself: the house and plantation’s other residents are barely acknowledged. References to Monticello’s subordinate actors were made infrequently. In 1946 Marie Kimball wrote a pamphlet, “What to see at Monticello” in which she highlights the below-stairs service areas of Monticello.

There was always a series of dependent small buildings, housing the necessary adjuncts to a plantation, such as the laundry, the smoke house, dairy, the smithy, stables, carriage house, sometimes a school house, and always a kitchen. These Jefferson sought to subordinate to their proper importance by concealing as many as possible beneath the long terraces terminating in the two balanced outchambers. Thus, beneath the eastern terrace, are to be found the kitchen with its assemblage of ancient cooking utensils, the cook's room, another servant's room, the smoke room and the dairy. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S3 B9 Houston)

Further acknowledgement of Monticello's outbuildings is made in 1949. A TJMF report from October 1949 assesses the outbuildings to be necessary adjuncts to the house, but as the 'home that, while its owner lived, was given over entirely to the art of gracious living'; acknowledgement of those who inhabited the outbuildings was not necessary to an appreciation of Jefferson's good taste and ideals. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S3 B12 Houston) In fact in a letter from Monticello's restoration architect Milton Grigg, it is obvious that a study of the outbuildings, in this case those located along Mulberry Row, 'would further serve to reveal additional facets of Mr Jefferson's genius and interests' rather than expose information about the slave population who lived and worked along this road. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S10 B54 Bear c.1955)

Kimball's death in August 1955 marked the end of an era at Monticello. James Bear was employed by the TJMF as curator in December that year, taking over both Fiske and Marie Kimball's responsibilities. The museum policies the Kimballs' had established were so well entrenched and successful that Bear continued them, modifying them according to contemporary museum practice over the next thirty years. Bear's tenure as curator and later director of Monticello marks the next significant stage of evolution at Monticello.

### **1955 to 1985: 'Mr Jefferson in his Architectural Gem'**

The period 1955 to 1985 is characterized by the adoption of contemporary conservation practice, the TJMF leading the way in its introduction of historical

and architectural archaeology as tools to uncover the material history of Monticello. The use of these research approaches at Monticello were to have far-reaching effects, not only in the way discoveries influenced display, interpretation and museum policy on site, but also for their impact on the wider house museum and heritage field. Like his predecessor Kimball, whose adherence to determined policy ensured continuity of practice at Monticello and ultimately influenced other museum practitioners, James Bear's emphasis on archaeology for both architectural and landscape interpretation was immensely important to the development of professional house museum practice.

We know that evidence, whether documentary, archaeological or oral is not in and of itself absolute. Evidence requires interpretation. While Bear's activities at Monticello were comprehensively supported by sound data and scholarly research, his assumptions and interpretative outcomes were shaped by the culture of his times. We can observe his evolution and therefore contemporary attitudes by examining certain areas of development at Monticello between 1955 and 1985: specifically the recognition and then inclusion of Monticello's subordinate inhabitants, notably the slave population.

Before exploring the issues of slavery it is important to examine the progressive archaeological activities at Monticello, upon which the new developments depend. The first reference to archaeology in fact pre-dates Bear's association with Monticello. In 1947 new parking lots were proposed; the restoration architect Milton Grigg undertook a study to determine the location of the steward's shop 'in order that proper relation to the parking areas and walks be incorporated in that design.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S4 B20 FK, 20.1.1947) During Kimball's tenure at Monticello the use of architectural archaeology was not articulated policy, though Grigg had been an advisor to Kimball and the TJMF from about 1937. However the situation changed with Bear's arrival.

In a "Memorandum Concerning Restoration at Monticello", about 1956, the Restoration Committee recommended that an architectural historian be employed to undertake a 'thorough study of the Jefferson drawings relating to Monticello'. The Committee further suggested that the TJMF employ a qualified archaeologist

to make a study of the plantation. The Committee's objective – that the 'combination of the Archaeologist's report and the study of the Drawings and the abstractions from the correspondence and Account Books, etc to be the basis and authority for future restoration at Monticello' – marks a transition in policy towards archaeology. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S2 B3 Hildreth) The Board's acceptance of these submissions allowed for the first institutionally-initiated archaeology to commence along Mulberry Row in 1956.

A report of this research was printed in the *Monticello Newsletter*. The excavations were explained and assessment of the site was presented. Previous interpretations of the area were thoroughly overturned. For example, the remains of a building previously thought to be the Nailery were conclusively found to be those of the Joinery thanks to a study of Monticello's insurance plat of 1796 and assessment of the artefacts taken from the site. The report claimed 'There were a large number as well as different types of artifacts removed from the site<sup>9</sup> ... It must be kept in mind that persons other than Jefferson and his family lived at Monticello and they were quite capable of contributing to the store of artifacts.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S10 B109 Bear, 1957 2 (Sept.)) The result of this early archaeology was to resonate for years. Indisputable physical evidence challenged contemporary readings of the site and the interpretive focus of operations. cursory acknowledgment was made at last of Monticello's hidden population. At this stage of the story, the life of slaves briefly uncovered by the excavation simply resulted in acknowledgement of their presence. It would be decades before the slave population would actually be included in interpretation.

The TJMF Board did not shy away from challenges to the physical interpretation of Monticello; at this stage their understanding of Jefferson was not threatened. In fact, they welcomed the new research approach, realizing that it was advancing the field of historical archaeological research and therefore heritage practice. Walter Muir Whitehill, a TJMF board member, recognized the innovative

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<sup>9</sup> The finds were displayed in the Museum Room, opened in the basement in August 1957.

approach and took pride in reporting it to fellow museum men. One such colleague, Mr Drew, Director of the Peabody Museum, concurred with Whitehill that 'there is very little work [of] that high professional sort that has been undertaken and what Mr Bear and the man working for us have done represents sufficient to set forth in printing some record of it for other people to follow.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S2 B5 Hildreth, 13.12.1957) Recognition of the importance of this research for museum practice was no doubt assisted by the new makeup of the Board which itself had moved towards incorporating professional skills, following Hildreth's recommendation that it have 'three members [out of nine] in order of Librarians, Curators of Museums, and Historians.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S2 B3 Hildreth, 17.4.1957)

Archaeology of the house and grounds continued at Monticello after the first excavation of Mulberry Row in 1956. The focus of archaeological activity in the grounds throughout the 1960s to the mid-1970s was directed to the topography of the mountain upon which Monticello sits. In the Curator's Report of 1963 Bear notes that 'Knowledge of the location of Monticello's roads is vital, and particularly so, if construction and restoration of outside areas are undertaken. Sites should be known and plotted on our topographic map of the top of the mountain to determine the relation between objects existing now and the courses of the original roads.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S2 B5 Hildreth) By 1976 Bear could look back and show that archaeology had reintroduced Jefferson's layout to Monticello. Future restoration of the plantation's gardens and structures would be guided by these findings and by ongoing projects: in 1976 dwelling house sites and slave burial sites were afforded priority. Bear provided the rationale for ongoing archaeological excavation: 'there are many sites at Monticello which warrant the services of a trained archaeologist. This work will develop the sites as possible exhibits and yield information on Monticello's industries and the lives of its workmen.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S10 B106 Bear) In fact, not only were the artefacts exhibited as evidence; by 1979 the staff archaeologists themselves became part of the visitor experience, 'Visit also with our staff archaeologists as they dig for the past in the Monticello gardens.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S10



B54 Bear, 10.1979) Such public display of the Foundation's research activity supported its claims of accuracy in presentation and interpretation.

Between the 1960s and the 1970s the social history revolution began to influence museum activities, reshaping research directions. Its influence is demonstrated in the TJMF's response to the evidence provided by archaeological research: from recognizing the presence of slaves and other workers on the plantation (1957) to actively employing archaeology to learn about them: the objective being to exhibit the physical remains of their lives and interpret their activities as part of the Monticello history. The result of the archaeological project proposed in 1976 was the creation of an African-American exhibit, opened in 1980 and located in the house's basement, or as St George says in the "bowels" of the big house, 'implicitly preserving a hierarchy of significance in interpretation.' (St George 1999, 232)

Architectural archaeology was also undertaken during this period: the first paint analysis was conducted in 1973. A sample of each layer of paint (on some walls as many as five were identified) was recorded and used to guide future decorating. Other architectural studies were undertaken, building on the work of the restoration architect Grigg who had recorded and studied the site since 1937.

The proofs of archaeology were a key claim to authenticity in Monticello's evolution, but without interpretation their findings were mute. The shift in emphasis from Jefferson's-Monticello to a working-plantation-with-Jefferson-the-overseer-of-a-large-population-of-family-and-slaves, required articulation. Bear oversaw the two principal means by which this was achieved: guided tours and new presentation.

When Bear assumed curatorial responsibility for Monticello, the Collections Policy was based mainly on the recovery of original household furnishings of Monticello and the personal possessions of Thomas Jefferson and his family. 'Authentic items are continually being assembled by gift, deposit and purchase, while information on outstanding relics and furnishings is gathered for record

purposes and possible acquisition.’ (Monticello Archives: TJMF S2 B5 Hildreth, 1956)

Despite the presence of such a well-considered and long-established policy some non-Jefferson pieces had entered the collection. In 1946 Fiske and Marie Kimball had purchased period furniture for the drawing room, when they realized the original items were no longer available. After a number of years, the inclusion of these period pieces in a museum with such an explicitly stated collections policy created an assumption that the furniture was directly attributable to Jefferson. This paradox raised much discussion, as highlighted in correspondence between Board members Hildreth and Dr Julian P. Boyd, and in hindsight alerts us to a broader issue addressed by Bear (and all other curators): authenticity versus accuracy in museum display.

It appears to me from reading this that you were under the impression that all of the articles presently in place at Monticello were “Things that we knew really belonged to Jefferson or were properly there.” As a matter of fact, there are a great many things at Monticello which we know were never there in Mr Jefferson’s time and never really belonged to Mr Jefferson. ... Most of these articles which I am referring to as not having belonged to Mr Jefferson are of the period and were bought under the authority of previous Boards.

Conspicuous examples are the furniture in the drawing room ... Mr Kimball thought that these articles were of the period and that they resembled the descriptions which Mr Jefferson made of his purchases for that room. The mirrors, the piano and stool, and most of the pictures in this room are authentic. ... Another important case in point is the kitchen equipment. If any part of this is authentic it would be a great astonishment to me although I feel sure it is of the period. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S2 B3 Hildreth, 2.2.1960)

Hildreth raised another sensitive issue in the management and interpretation of an iconic historic site: the public preference for static continuity in displays, a reality

that has challenged many a curator intending to update or upgrade long-standing installations.

I believe that in a situation where this question arises that we are stuck with our present décor whether we like it or not and whether it is authentic or not because these things have been there so long now that there would be a terrific furor if they were changed. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S2 B3 Hildreth, 2.2.1960)

He acknowledged the dilemma of new knowledge and higher standards in historic site management and the challenge they throw down to the record of previous presentations, with all *their* claims to correctness and authenticity.

I might add that the way you set forth in your letter, “Our policy is preservation before restoration and restoration before reconstruction”, appeals to me very strongly. As the situation now stands, however, we have already tampered with Monticello and one question which cries for a solution is whether we destroy these tamperings and make an authentic restoration first or whether we first complete Mulberry Row allowing the portions tampered with to remain until some later date. Since our tamperings seem to have met with very good acceptance and very little criticism I would be inclined to adhere to the latter course. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S2 B3 Hildreth, 7.4.1960)

And that is what they did.

In the early years of the TJMF’s management of Monticello, awakening public interest in the new hero Jefferson required the promulgation of familiarizing narratives. Over the years these assumed pervasive, mythic authority, shaping public expectations of Monticello. As new research methods recast the presentation of Monticello, popular taste based on the Foundation’s own 1920’s myths came into conflict with contemporary interpretation. Monticello shines with the *numen* of Jefferson thanks to the efforts of the TJMF and its adherence to Kimball’s policy. Hildreth’s recognition that Monticello’s display was not

accurate, and his reluctance to challenge it for fear of upsetting the public, provides an insight into the perceived purpose of the TJMF.

For despite new professional practices, Monticello continued to be understood as a medium in which the spirit of Jefferson was to be conjured. His enormous attachment to the fabric of the house, its grounds and its buildings, all the creation of his own genius, was understood as more influential than his conjectural attachment to the furniture and furnishings. To the Board, Jefferson's numinosity was not distributed evenly throughout Monticello or in every object. For instance, as Hildreth wrote in 1967, 'the third floor so called ball room is relatively unimportant since Thomas Jefferson rarely used it.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S2 B4 Hildreth, 23.9.1965)

There were objects and rooms in which it was agreed that Jefferson's *numen* resonated brightly and these were considered vital to the telling of the Jefferson story. The Library Room proposed by Kimball in 1940 became a major project of Bear's early tenure. While obviously a recreated space with a period collection – the original books having been sold by Jefferson to the Library of Congress – the library became an important symbol of the great man's learning and belief in the value of education. This message was one the Foundation was keen to promote: 'Monticello ... is unique in placing its emphasis upon the advancement of learning. This, the Foundation believes, is the most effective and most appropriate way in which it can promote the objects that were at the center of Jefferson's purpose.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S2 B4 Hildreth, 19.11.1962) In his 1960 Curator's Report Bear proclaimed 'Nothing done within the house in the last several years has added more to its appearance or has better reflected Jefferson's love of books and of study.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S9 B38 Thacker)

The Entrance Hall was another room that generated both curatorial and public attention, for in Jefferson's day this space, where he greeted his guests (and where from 1949 visitors to Monticello started their tour) was presented as a cabinet of curiosities. Exposing Jefferson's interest in scientific observation and cultural authority, the exhibits in his cabinet included maps, Native American artefacts, Paleolithic remains, busts of philosophers and men of influence, and religious

paintings. (Upton 1998, 38) The 1961 presentation, though grounded in scholarly research, was rather austere when compared to contemporary accounts. Bear acknowledged 'There is such a great contrast that one might conjecture that Jefferson would find it difficult to acclimate himself in his own home were he able to return to it today. However, he would find relatively unchanged the location of the statuary, engravings, and paintings that were there in his lifetime. The majority of these, if not in the exact spot, are in the same rooms.' (Bear 1961, 22)



Illustration 13: The Entrance Hall as presented by James Bear, 1967  
(Photograph © TJMF)

This concentration on provenanced objects in original locations determined the focus of guided tours throughout the Kimball and Bear eras. The objects that possessed spiritual importance and the areas of the house where Jefferson's *numen* was strongest were primary. In 1951 the Kimballs introduced both a new tour

script and new guides: local ladies known as hostesses replaced male, African-American guides. Bear wrote in the 1970s the 'tour text has been slightly altered by additions of new furnishings and facts concerning these and Jefferson, but even so, it has varied little in the eighteen years since its adoption.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S10 B98 Bear, c.1970s) Change entered, however, with the introduction of hostess training and evaluation programs: 'The programs are kept up to date by the infusion of ever appearing new facts to keep pace with an increasingly knowledgeable tide of visitors.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S10 B98 Bear, c.1970s) Implicit in this statement is Bear's faith in ongoing research. As more facts are unearthed 'an ever more complete and accurate re-creation of the past' would result. (Handler 1997, 70)

The TJMF's archives provide a history of regular guide training from the mid-1960s. The following two examples of educational programs demonstrate management's objectives for the kind of guide employed, as much as the substance they were expected to provide to visitors.

1966: To indoctrinate the new ladies and to increase the well-established efficiency of the "old" ones, a series of talks on Jefferson and Monticello has been arranged. Mr John C. Wyllie, Librarian of the Alderman Library, has given the first talk - a discussion in detail of the main facts and fictions of slaves and slavery at Monticello. A second has been an illustrated lecture on Jefferson and France with stress on what the Curator saw there and how some of it is reflected here. There will be future discussions by Professors Dumas Malone and Frederick D. Nichols and, finally, one on the various periods of furniture represented in Monticello. These, of course, are above the basic instruction given by Mrs Tilman and myself. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S9 B38 Thacker, 1966 Bear's Report)

1969: Planned to extend the hostess training program by having experts in several related fields of interest come to Monticello and talk to the hostesses and Gift Shop personnel. The following talks have been planned:

1. Social life in Virginia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Miss Jane Carson, chief researcher, Colonial Williamsburg.

2. Jefferson's furniture at Monticello, Mr Milo Naeve, Curator of Colonial Williamsburg.
  3. Monticello - Its architectural style, Mr Frederick Nichols, Professor of Architecture, University of Virginia.
  4. Jefferson's health, Dr Fred Hartie, University of Virginia Hospital.
  5. Jefferson and the Ladies, James A. Bear, Jr.
- (Monticello Archives: TJMF S10 B78 Bear, 1969 Bear's Report)

A reading of 1960's tour-script summaries demonstrates that the underlying principle was to highlight the aesthetic; emphasize historical associations; and applaud Jefferson's genius. Repeated frequently in these texts are the phrases 'owned by Mr Jefferson', 'belonged to the family', 'belonged to Mr Jefferson'. Close proximity to the body and spirit of Jefferson was conjured up in the bedroom: 'He died in this room on July 4, 1826 at the age of 83 years.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S10 B90 Bear, 1967-1971) And at the end of the tour visitors were advised that they could visit the great man's grave, just a few hundred yards from the house. Scripts dating from the late-1970s are little different, though they provide more contextual explanations of Jefferson's life and the objects on view. For example, guides were instructed to 'Explain the use of this room as a Museum, pointing out Mr Jefferson's great interest in natural history and related fields. Point out the articles now in the room ... with a description of the other things he had'; 'important dates relating to Jefferson's life and career are to be provided'; 'Give the guests some family history'. At the end of this summary, Bear declared the purpose of the guided tour: 'What we are trying to do is to put Mr Jefferson in his architectural gem.' (Monticello Archives: TJMF S10 B98 Bear, 1977-1978) Despite the use of new, 1970's museum techniques and the adoption of contemporary perspectives in professional understanding, the public message within the house remained very focused on the numinous presence of the hero as expressed through his material possessions.

The continuing program of research at Monticello, fully exploited after Bear's arrival, enabled Jefferson to be interpreted in his 'architectural gem'. Bear's extensive records of research activities at Monticello consistently address the

importance of research to the development of a comprehensive picture of Jefferson. In the 1976 Curator's Report Bear claims that a primary objective of his current research was to determine the domestic elements of Jefferson's life. Bear expatiated on his new direction:

Monticello is not merely a historical monument. It is a work of art created by one of the most versatile and civilized minds in all history. It is the symbol of universal hope. In this sense it is unique for it reflects the power and the continuing influence of a single human being possessed by an enduring idea. The quarter of a million people who visit Monticello annually are drawn there not only by the architecture, the scenery, and the historic associations, but also by the magnetic influence of the idea and the personality. Thus the insistent question for those who have custody of Monticello goes far beyond mere responsibility for preserving the building and furnishing it with the things that were there during Jefferson's lifetime. It becomes a question of teaching, a question of imparting the meaning of the man and his remarkable home, a question of how to keep the interior weathervane, the folding ladder, the seven day clock, the pivoting doors, the dumb waiter and other ingenious and characteristic contrivances from obscuring the deeper truth. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S10 B98 Bear, c.1970s)

Bear credits the success of Monticello to 'intellectual and scholarly concerns'. As he perceived the situation, the Foundation's pursuit of scholarly research had enabled them to counter 'the historical cult of reverence and myth'. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S10 B98 Bear, c. 1970s) Nonetheless, what visitors were presented with in reality was Jefferson the heroic Founding Father in his home, Monticello, the embodiment of his cultivated principles and testament to his genius. Despite evidence of their presence, the subordinate actors who filled the 'bowels' of Monticello and the plantation property remained largely invisible.

By the early 1980s archaeological excavations and historical study had unearthed the presence of Monticello's other inhabitants but their role in the Monticello story remained opaque. In 1960 the author and historian Merrill D. Peterson noted



that visitors to Monticello did not see it ‘as it was in Jefferson’s time, overrun with children and slaves, ... battered from daily use and showing the ravages of debt; but Monticello expertly restored as an architectural masterpiece, a fascinating museum, a shrine to Jefferson’s memory.’ (Peterson 1960, 388) This picture was little altered two decades later.

### **1985 to 2000: A More Inclusive Portrait of Life at Monticello**

The latest stage of Monticello’s biography begins in 1985 with James Bear’s retirement and the appointment of Daniel Jordan as director. Under Jordan’s direction there has been a significant shift in interpretation at Monticello, away from the focus on the great man, towards recognition of the slave population. This change responds to the triumph of the social history movement, recognizing those dispossessed and excluded from history. Monticello is today perceived as a plantation community, and not simply Jefferson’s personal retreat. As Jordan stated ‘Until the mid-1980s, slavery was the “S” word among interpreters at the Foundation. The African-American community was invisible, leaving visitors with the impression that Jefferson lived and worked alone on his majestic mountaintop.’ (Jordan 1999, 13) This study of the most recent era of Monticello’s museum life addresses how visible the slave community really is at Monticello today. With its new programs, new specialist committees and off-site Visitor Center,<sup>10</sup> the TJMF has actively pursued alternative approaches to its stewardship of Monticello and Jefferson. But how much of an impact have these changes had on interpretation? How influential have the two factors – scholarly research and social history-inspired public demand – been upon the inclusion of slaves in the Monticello story? A number of commentators question the success of Jordan’s and the TJMF’s many initiatives, arguing that the African-American voice remains isolated.

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<sup>10</sup> The visitor center opened in 1985. It is currently located two miles away from Monticello, at the bottom of the ‘little mountain’ and attracts only one fifth of Monticello’s annual visitors. (Jordan interview, 7.9.1999)

Intimately linked to the issue of interpretation is one of perception, and unwillingness on the part of some staff and visitors to challenge the TJMF's long established interpretative position. From the outset the TJMF sought to memorialize Jefferson's life and great achievements; Monticello was the medium in which these accomplishments were celebrated. Celebratory narratives created in the TJMF's early days became such an integral part of the Monticello story that contesting them disrupts the public's link with this 'hero of democracy'. As new historical paradigms are addressed, supported by ongoing research, the celebratory nature of early interpretation has become incompatible with new, critical understandings. It has been noted that 'managed communities of memory are better equipped to celebrate rather than critique.' (Gable 1998) This is certainly true at long-established historic sites, especially those created with a commemorative purpose. The situation at Monticello highlights how professional responses to changing historiography require that previous interpretations be addressed and amended according to current cultural demands.

In an environment that contests the validity of long held beliefs, it is not surprising that some people, staff and visitors alike, feel threatened. At Monticello, the response by a few has been to question the legitimacy of the social history paradigm upon activities at established historic sites. Eric Gable's 1998 study of Monticello records one employee who asserted 'there are better sites to talk about slavery than Monticello, because Monticello is devoted to Jefferson and not the "Panorama of social history".' (Gable 1998) While this is not the position taken by the TJMF or the majority of staff, it does highlight a problem inherent in the TJMF's activities. How can Jefferson be presented as the great man within the parameters of social history? How can Jefferson's great achievements be celebrated, while broader issues of slavery – no longer acceptable in our own time – and plantation life are scrupulously explored? How can a hero be an exploiter and abuser of humans?

To respond to the demands of social history, the TJMF has had to adjust its original objective. A Master Plan developed in the mid-1980s presented the TJMF's new objective to present a more inclusive interpretation of life at

Monticello during Jefferson's day: 'Jefferson cannot be understood without understanding slavery, and Monticello cannot be understood without understanding its African-American community.' (Jordan 1999, 13) In order to realize this objective, a new commitment to rigorous research based on documentary evidence, archaeology, architectural archaeology and history, and oral history was made. Oral history, a methodology given credibility by social historians, supported "Getting Word", a project in which over one hundred descendants of Monticello slaves were interviewed. Significant to the development of research on social history at Monticello was the creation in 1992 of an Advisory Committee on African-American Interpretation. The committee ensures the "S" word receives more than cursory attention. Its establishment is representative of the way the TJMF has always responded to challenges to interpretation. In an environment where research drives interpretation, the only means by which to comprehend the challenges raised by new evidence is to understand their rationale. Research demands further research.

As in all previous research regimes at Monticello, a scholarly approach does not guarantee all contradictions are acknowledged. The authority of almost all research can be manipulated to support established narratives. The reliance on 'fact' over traditional knowledge has been an ongoing topic for critical assessment of Monticello's activities these past fifteen years. (Gable 1998; Handler 1997; St George 1999; Upton 1998) The TJMF's commitment to providing a more inclusive portrait of life at Monticello in the mid-1980s brought the issue of slavery to the forefront. In the late-1980s, interpretation of slavery was focused on the slave quarters in Mulberry Row, in the archaeological exhibitions displayed in the Museum Room located in Monticello's under passages, and at the Visitor Center. But one figure's absence from the Monticello story began to ignite comment: Sally Hemings, a domestic, mulatto slave who allegedly had a sexual relationship with Jefferson which resulted in the birth of at least one son, Tom Woodson.

The Jefferson-Hemings relationship is denied by Jefferson's family, and discounted by many scholars, yet continues to cause debate. The current

*Guidebook* asserts that discussion about such a controversial issue is welcome, even one that dramatically undermines interpretation of Jefferson as a moral hero. (TJMF 1997, 105) But scholars of the 1990s have not found conclusive evidence to support the Hemings family claim, allowing the TJMF to treat the idea as rumour only. Of course, the scholars the *Guidebook* refers to are predominantly white, and they tend to base their judgments on an understanding of Jefferson's character, rather than on oral testimony. (Gable 1998) Interest in the Jefferson-Hemings relationship has not been dampened: visitors have been keen to know the truth of the story. But guides, following TJMF policy, do not refer to the issue in tours of the house, and when challenged by the public their general response has been called 'stonewalling'. By invoking the authority of professional historians the guides discredit the story.

The irony of this situation is that the evidence for the Jefferson-Hemings relationship derives from Jordan's special project, "Getting Word", the oral histories of more than one hundred descendants of Monticello slaves. Begun in 1993 "Getting Word" formed the basis of an exhibition about slave life at Monticello, now on display in the Visitors Center. Also in 1993 "Plantation Community" tours and weekends were offered for the first time. These tours focus upon Mulberry Row, the plantation street along which slaves lived, and the south dependencies where the kitchen and cook's room are located. They were prepared using documentary and archaeological evidence gathered from years of excavations. Unquestionably comprehensive, the plantation tours are credited with an ever-greater degree of authority thanks to ever more reliable scientific and archival research.

Both "Getting Word" and the "Plantation Community" tours give slavery a large presence at Monticello. The "Plantation Community" tour is located on-site in summer when it is very much part of the visitor experience; "Getting Word" is installed off-site at the Monticello Visitor Center. Locating the "Getting Word" exhibition two miles away highlights an awkward inconsistency: it weakens the authoritative power of oral testimony over professional history. Rumours such as the Sally Hemings story are given a voice, but they do not affect on-site

interpretation at Monticello. The “Getting Word” brochure acknowledges that ‘Oral communication has been a primary way of knowing for African Americans. They sought to “Get Word” of family members, and of events in the lives of those they cared about. The Monticello oral history project grew out of a recognition of the importance of oral traditions and their preservation.’ (Monticello Archives: TJMF brochure, c.1999) As with so many marginalized groups whose histories have received scholarly and public attention only with the rise of social history, documentary records of slaves’ lives is scarce, especially evidence in their own voices. Thus dispossessed groups have relied on oral tradition as a way of maintaining links and remembering their histories. Acknowledging the presence of oral tradition and its importance to subordinate groups is not sufficient if these histories are not afforded the same authoritative voice as other research methods. By locating “Getting Word” some distance from the house, the TJMF effectively separates the African-American voice of memory from the voice of professional history.

For vernacular tradition to become fact at Monticello, irrefutable scientific or documentary proof is required. The Woodson family, descendants of Sally Hemings, held a reunion in 1992, catalyzing the creation of the African-American Advisory Committee. Research instigated by this Committee increased the visibility of slavery at Monticello but it did not settle the persistent rumour of a liaison between Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson. Hence in 1998 the TJMF initiated DNA testing to determine by modern scientific techniques the truth of the rumour.

Daniel Jordan addressed the findings in “To Follow Truth Wherever it May Lead: Dealing with the DNA Controversy at Monticello”. (1999) The tests suggested ‘that a Jefferson male chromosome was linked to at least one child of the slave Sally Hemings.’ (Jordan 1999, 13) The central message of Jordan’s article however is not the outcome of the test, but rather reaffirmation that the TJMF always investigates new research directions as they emerge, so that interpretation at Monticello is as accurate as possible. Jordan urges the reader: ‘Remind yourself that interpretation is a work in progress. At Monticello, we learn as we go from

our own mistakes and from the accomplishments of other programs. Research drives interpretation, and research will bring new information and insights.’ (1999, 15) Scientific research has managed to achieve what oral testimony could not. As a credible source, it offers genetic evidence that directly challenges the Foundation’s current interpretation. The test for the TJMF now is to see how it incorporates these findings into its interpretive program. For despite the growing visibility of an African-American community, interpretation of Monticello and Jefferson himself has altered little during Jordan’s tenure.

An understanding of slavery at Monticello has enriched the museum’s programs, but it has not altered the dominant focus of interpretation. The inclusion of plantation tours and oral history projects accentuates a hierarchy at Monticello: Thomas Jefferson in his mountaintop home at the apex of the pyramid; domestic and Mulberry Row slaves supporting this infrastructure; the other plantation slaves still silent and invisible. The structure of tours and Jefferson’s own architectural plans continue to perpetuate this hierarchy.

House tours remain the primary focus of interpretive activity and are undoubtedly what the visitors go to Monticello for. In 1998 approximately 550,000 people visited Monticello, though only 39,500 participated in plantation tours, just less than 14% of the annual attendance. The house tour differs little from those assessed by Bear in the late-1970s, with the proviso that as research uncovers information about objects, rooms, visitors, etc the script is amended accordingly. The policy of collecting Jefferson-owned pieces still determines display. To mark Jefferson’s 250<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1993, many objects once housed at Monticello were borrowed from descendants and museums for a special exhibition, aimed at presenting a more complete picture of Jefferson the collector, connoisseur, and scientific observer. The decision to emphasize Jefferson’s role as collector during his birthday celebrations complements the prevailing tone of house tours: what visitors are treated to is ‘a quintessential “house and garden” tour with Jefferson – America’s aesthete and cultivated consumer – playing invisible host.’ (Gable 1998) Echoing the influence of civil religion on the creation and promotion of the Great Man house museum genre, Gable notes that ‘Jefferson’s pursuit of

knowledge and aesthetic pleasures have been portrayed as both a sign of and a reward for Jefferson's success and living a life according to civic virtues he authored.' (1998) The highly patriotic tenor of interpretation at Monticello has relaxed over the years but glimpses are still evident.

As Bear noted in the 1970s, a tour is only as good as the guide giving it. One of the problems the TJMF faces as further challenges to established interpretation emerge is ensuring the changes are not only acknowledged but also embraced. Guides like the one who stated 'Monticello is devoted to Jefferson and not "the panorama of social history"' are out of touch with the current line. Yet as late as September 1999, I encountered guides who talked knowledgably about Monticello and Jefferson in accordance with the tour script, but failed to mention the plantation tours or alternative interpretations offered. Given the new evidence that supports the Sally Hemings rumour, it will be interesting to see how such entrenched perceptions respond to ongoing visitor curiosity.

What is most noticeable about Monticello's house tours at the turn of the twenty-first century is the continuing absence of slaves from the narrative. The Sally Hemings issue aside, Monticello was staffed by a number of domestic slaves who were always present in the house. The perspective of the master of a household makes all subordinate inhabitants invisible, whether women, children or slaves, and this was certainly true of Jefferson's Monticello. Like other Virginia slaveholders, Jefferson designed separate paths through the house for black and white residents. The ground floor level was largely the patriarch Jefferson's space; guests and family members slept upstairs, while the domestic slaves inhabited the dependencies and/or Mulberry Row. By showing visitors only the ground floor, many of the other occupants of the house continue to be invisible even in an age that seeks out the stories of the marginal. The presentation of Monticello (common to most house museums) implies that it was the home of one man rather than a family of relatives, servants and slaves. As Dell Upton points out it was Jefferson's own conceit that he represented himself as a 'hermit alone on his mountain.' (1998, 30) Here is a reality yet to be interpreted, perhaps because it fails to support the singularity of the great man. It would however be entirely

feasible to present the complexities of race, gender and status of the many people who occupied Monticello with Jefferson.

For example, rather than interpreting the dumbwaiter as an ingenious invention, we could be introduced to the question of separate routes and spaces for slaves and family. The spatial-use analysis of a house opens up new avenues for interpreting human relationships within Monticello's structure, which would contribute to the TJMF's mission to provide a more 'inclusive portrait of life at Monticello'. In future the TJMF might consider combining the current tour of the house with a tour of the dependencies thus ensuring everyone goes away from Monticello with at least some understanding of Jefferson's role as slaveholder. Thus the hierarchical nature of plantation life would be explicitly explored rather than implied through the current separation of tours. Of course taking such a bold step would truly challenge the TJMF's original and ongoing justification. It would also challenge popular myths about Jeffersonian democracy and its relationship to individual freedom, equality of opportunity, and the pursuit of happiness.

But as Jordan himself says, 'controversy is a part of accurate history.' (1999, 15) It is just that controversy and dissent are difficult to present as the substance of neatly packaged tours of complex historic sites!



## Chapter 5 Evolution of House Museum Genres

### Introduction

Two factors encouraged the evolution of house museums in the United States and Australia. The first was preservation movements. Such movements oversaw the creation of the Great Man genre in mid nineteenth-century America and have been intimately linked with the evolving house museum movement throughout the twentieth century. Preservation movements provided a framework in which house museum genres could evolve by responding to and encouraging professional developments in house museography and conservation practice.

The second factor to encourage house museum evolution was the emergence of a complementary genre: Architectural house museums. Before the spread of historic preservation as a staple of public good, the few buildings to receive detailed conservation treatment were those selected to become museums, especially those chosen for their design and/or construction. In this way, the rise of Architectural house museums, identified according to such criteria, became an important testing ground for the application of ever more scientific principles of conservation. Ongoing research into building conservation, developments in house museum practice and changing historiography supported the emergence of a house museography.

This chapter provides a synopsis of the activities of preservation organizations that bear directly upon the house museum movement; it does not provide a complete history of the United States preservation movement: for such a history Charles Hosmer's volumes are the most comprehensive. (1963, 1965 & 1981) Of particular interest are those preservation organizations that influenced the development of Architectural house museums, for it was at these sites that early developments in conservation practice were tested. Preservation organizations responsible for Great Man house museums at this time were more focused on the *numen* than the shell, and thus their contributions to the early development of

conservation practice were minimal. The situation began to change in the years preceding World War II as house museums of all types started to implement new conservation techniques into their programs, often developing them further on site, as evidenced by archaeological activities at Monticello in the 1950s and 1960s. (Chapter 4) With this emphasis on physical conservation at Architectural and Great Man house museums, it is not surprising that eventually it was believed that if the structure of a house was understood and interpreted authentically, then accurate interpretive narratives would follow.

### Historic Preservation in the United States

The cultural environment that encouraged the creation of the Great Man house museum was discussed in Chapter 2. In summary, mid nineteenth-century America was a period marked by uncertainty: memories of the nation's revolutionary heroes were fading, immigrants were unsettling the established social order, the north/south divide grew, and industrialization was visibly altering building design and construction. In such a climate, patriotism among United States citizens was encouraged through civil religion. Great Man house museums became major sites of pilgrimage for this new, secular religion. The early Great Man house museums relied on the *numen* of their hero to successfully present the ideals of nationalism: in the early years the hero most commonly identified was George Washington. But recognition that sites imbued with numinosity could act as temples of the new religion required promotion and thus a preservation movement that could spread such a message was born.<sup>11</sup> Preservation groups created many of the narratives and traditions presented at Great Man house museums. As the preservation movement evolved, so too did the scope and rationale of house museums: houses of heroes other than George Washington emerged, so did houses where architectural merit justified their preservation.

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<sup>11</sup> As Hosmer correctly asserts, there was no cohesive movement rather many individual groups some of which only survived a few years, but they all had the same purpose in mind.

The United States preservation movement has received a great deal of academic attention in the past few decades. (Barthel 1996; Hosmer 1963, 1965, 1981; Jacobs 1963; Jokilehto 1999; Liebs 1978; Rains 1966; Stipe 1987; West, 1999; et al) The heritage and genealogical societies that were responsible for the development of the movement are a principal focus of these studies. Well documented are the activities of Anne Pamela Cunningham and the Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA) founded in 1856. (Alexander 1983; Barthel 1996; Hosmer 1965; Lindgren 1991; Stillinger 1980; Wallace 1986; West 1999) The impact the MVLA had upon the house museum and historic preservation movement cannot be overestimated: 'almost every early preservation group had some contact with the Ladies' Association.' Not only did subsequent groups model themselves upon the MVLA, they also 'thought that old houses in their communities could be saved in the same manner in which Mount Vernon had been rescued.' (Hosmer 1965, 57)

Genealogical societies have also received much analysis, notably the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and the Colonial Dames (CD). (Hosmer 1965; Murphy 1992; Stillinger 1980; West 1999) These societies, whose membership more than doubled between 1870 and 1890, were indebted to the MVLA. Genealogical societies were created at a time when concern about the 'quality of American life' was high due to the ramifications of the Civil War and the continuing influx of immigrants. Older families who felt threatened by the new arrivals were keen to 'create psychological distance from recent immigrants by emphasis[ing] ... their family's presence in America for generations.' (Stillinger 1980, 51) In their role as preservers of America's past, genealogical societies set about promoting the sacred values they believed represented national ideals. The rationale of such societies was to educate new immigrants to the American way of life: this was done at the houses they administered. In the mould of the MVLA, the DAR, the Colonial Dames, the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), et al, operated houses that became sites of pilgrimage for civil religion, and venues for the promotion of patriotic education by an established social order. Examples include the Lebanon War Office, Lebanon, CT (SAR & DAR); Macy-Colby House, Amesbury, MA (DAR); Quincy Homestead, Quincy, MA (CD); Van

Cortlandt House, New York City, NY (CD); Governor George Clinton House, Poughkeepsie, NY (DAR); Andrew Johnson House, Raleigh, NC (CD); Block House, Pittsburgh, PA (DAR); and Whitehall, Middletown, RI (CD). (Coleman 1933) Genealogical societies were vital to the continuing promotion of Colonial Revival as the preferred style of wholesome American living. Post-Civil War Americans romanticized the image of colonial America. They perceived it to be a golden age when people lived in harmony, life was easier and the rewards greater. In this milieu of nostalgia, artefacts and houses from the colonial era assumed special qualities: they were imbued with the spirit of the age. They were therefore seen as ideal conduits for presenting American traditions and values to recently arrived foreigners and ‘less enlightened natives.’ (Stillinger 1980, 125)

Historical societies formed in the post-Civil War era also modelled themselves on the MVLA. Their focus was predominantly local and/or state rather than national issues. Many historical societies rescued houses; some were converted to museum status always with the purpose of patriotic education, but most were acquired as headquarters for the societies’ activities.

As houses started to be rescued for purposes other than the promotion of hero worship – i.e. as headquarters for historical organizations – the realization that historical association was not the only criterion for preservation became evident. Recognition that architectural merit was an appropriate reason for rescue slowly began to gain acceptance, reaching its apogee with the creation of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) in 1910.

### **Design, Aesthetic or Vernacular Criteria: the Birth of a New House Museum Type**

Until the 1920s the majority of Architectural house museums preserved in the United States were identified for their association with a renowned architect. (Hosmer 1965, 269) The Great Man phenomenon thus influenced this new stream of house museum, and today we see resonance of it in Great Man-Architectural house museums like Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater, PA; Walter Gropius’

Gropius House, MA; and Harry Seidler's Rose Seidler House, Sydney, where the architect's *numen* contributes to the house's significance.

The preservation of buildings, including houses, for their architectural value was encouraged by the early involvement of architects in the preservation arena. These architects were primarily concerned with educating the public to the aesthetic pleasures of good architecture. Emphasizing a site's patriotic associations was not high on their agenda. Architects in the late nineteenth-century were primarily concerned with identifying public buildings under threat of demolition or alteration. To that end, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) established a Committee of Conservators of Public Architecture of the Country in 1890. The demolition of New York's Customs House in 1897 saw the end of the Committee when it realized it had no real power in the face of urban development.

The eventual success of the architectural stream of house museums owed much to the efforts of William Sumner Appleton, who formed the SPNEA in 1910. Appleton had an holistic approach to architectural preservation: he believed that houses preserved with complementary artefacts allowed whole communities to be interpreted. The aim of the SPNEA as expressed by Appleton was 'to preserve and document New England's past through its art, artifacts, and historic properties.' (Butcher-Youngmans 1993, 34) The SPNEA selected a number of houses for preservation over the years, believing an association dedicated to historic preservation was better able to manage, restore and interpret houses than groups more concerned with promoting historic or familial associations. Such groups, by the nature of their being, were responsible for the preservation of single houses, i.e. they were largely one-house organizations. Appleton was critical of such societies' actions. Preserving houses in isolation for the sole purpose of glorifying an individual meant the house's contextual relationship to the broader community was lost. It also resulted in other worthwhile houses in the locale being ignored.

The creation of the SPNEA signaled a growing professionalism of the preservation and house museum fields. From the outset the SPNEA adopted a reasoned philosophy that underpinned all its preservation activities. Three strands

of its philosophy are worth noting. Firstly, Appleton was convinced that architectural considerations – aesthetics, vernacular examples or uniqueness – were valid criteria for preservation. Appleton advocated the rescue and preservation of houses without historical association, though recognition of a house's domestic history complemented interpretation. Secondly, Appleton advocated 'adaptive uses' for houses. He recognized that some houses were not suited to the constraints placed upon them as museums open to the public. In such instances, houses were preserved to halt future decay, and then leased or sold back to communities for occupation and use. The SPNEA, when landlords of such sites, maintained a close link with the house and its occupants. Thirdly, Appleton actively participated in the international preservation scene, collecting information on foreign organizations' activities and maintaining a correspondence with colleagues at the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) and the National Trust in England, *Monuments historiques* in France and Skansen in Sweden. Appleton closely associated the SPNEA's policies with those of SPAB, the English preservation society formed in 1877 by William Morris, based on principles proposed by John Ruskin. Both societies were opposed 'to any kind of restoration that would destroy old work on a building'. (Hosmer 1965, 255) This approach was known as the 'anti-scrape' philosophy. In essence, Ruskin, Morris and Appleton were critical of the nineteenth-century restoration methods in which layers of a building's history were scraped back to reveal the 'original' form. They did not identify one period of a building's history as being more important than another. When a building was preserved all stages of its life were valued. The approach SPAB and SPNEA followed was maintenance and conservation rather than restoration.

While the philosophy outlined above foretold a new, progressivist approach to conservation methodology and house museography, the sites selected for preservation root the SPNEA's activities within a contemporary, class-based aesthetic closely aligned with the sentiments of Colonial Revival. The SPNEA preserved buildings that predated the impact of industrialization, mass immigration and civil unrest. The selection of sites confirmed the early twentieth-

century fantasy that the pre-Revolutionary and colonial eras represented the American ideal.

The SPNEA has evolved in its 90-year history adapting to contemporary cultural and historical trends. The philosophy adopted by Appleton in 1910 continues to direct activity at the Society's 35 museums and over 60 privately owned historic properties. Growing from the 'anti-scrape' philosophy of Ruskin and Morris and from acknowledgement that all stages of a building's life contribute to its history, the SPNEA today preserves houses as received with their histories to that moment intact.

Time is a continuing process. People change, their ideas and tastes change. These changes are reflected in the additions to, and remodelings of, their houses, in the introduction of new pieces of furniture, in the adoption of the latest method of cooking or heating. An old house reflects strivings for comfort and convenience, varying fortunes and revolving tastes. To restore a house is to deny this, to preserve a house as it comes to us is to affirm it.  
(Wren 1971, 56)

The selection of houses has also broadened. In line with the social history paradigm, a range of socioeconomic examples is preserved, as are buildings dating from the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. The SPNEA has to be credited with encouraging professional practice in the heritage sector. Its philosophies continue to influence the preservation arena with new heritage organizations like the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales learning from its methods.

The period following World War I saw a remarkable growth of interest in old buildings, especially those of architectural rather than historical merit (Hosmer 1965, 299). The Great Man house museum movement continued to flourish, and federal and state governments, who up to this time had maintained minimal involvement in preservation activities, started to take an interest. In order for house museums to continue to evolve, their administrators had to respond to cultural change, and often this required approaching their responsibilities in a new

way. Much of the cultural change was encouraged by the development of professional heritage bodies and increasing government legislation.

### **The Role of Government in the United States Preservation Movement**

The United States government created the National Park Service (NPS), a bureau of the Department of the Interior, in 1916, thereby demonstrating its commitment to the preservation of America's built and natural heritage. Prior to 1916, the Antiquities Act of 1906 was the only federal heritage legislation to have been passed. This Act 'codified the federal government's concern for preserving archaeological sites.' (Murtagh 1992, 51) The focus of the NPS was broader. It was responsible for the administration of national historic sites, parks and monuments. Its remit was to 'conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such a means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generation.' (Jacobs 1963, 6-7) Maintenance of the existing stock of historic sites was the NPS's objective at this time.

By 1930, the NPS's influence upon United States preservation was noticeable across the country. The majority of restoration projects during this period were overseen by the NPS; its actions defined United States preservation policies. In 1933 the NPS in collaboration with the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the Library of Congress launched an ambitious project that was to contribute greatly to the development of architectural archaeology: the Historic American Building Survey (HABS). The HABS survey, proposed by Colonial Williamsburg architect Charles Pearson, was to provide a 'national archive of historic American architecture, through detailed recording by measured drawings, photogrammetry, photographs, and historic and architectural documentation.' (Garvey 1968, 22) The HABS survey focused on buildings of national significance: in line with contemporary taste, colonial and federal periods dominated the surveyors' reports. An interesting aspect of the survey was the assessment of what was nationally significant: historical association with a famous individual or event was not the



sole criterion for selection; architectural character – high style or vernacular – could also constitute value.

In 1935, two years after the HAB survey was proposed, the United States federal government passed the Historic Sites Act, providing the statutory basis for a national survey of historic buildings, the Historic Sites Survey (HSS). The HSS provided for the collation and preservation of ‘drawings, plans, photographs and data of historic and archaeological sites, buildings and objects ... for the purpose of determining which possess exceptional value as commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States.’ The surveyors were to ‘make necessary investigations and researches in the United States relating to particular sites, buildings, or objects to obtain true and accurate archaeological facts and information concerning same.’ (Fowler 1987, 38) The two surveys, HABS and HSS, along with the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) provided a rich architectural and archaeological resource for heritage researchers. The ongoing nature of the HAB survey encouraged a wider range of construction techniques to be recorded paralleling the broadening scope of building periods and architects considered. The foundation of the Society of Architectural Historians in 1940 provides further evidence that the architectural profession and its association with the heritage field continually evolved during this period of activity.

The federal government’s role in United States preservation between the 1930s and 1960s was focused upon the identification, documentation and commemoration of nationally significant sites: the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP), chartered by an Act of Congress in 1949, adopted similar principles. The NTHP and its precursor the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings (NCHSB) (1947) were publicly funded, nonprofit, nongovernmental, preservation organizations. Provision was made in the Charter for the National Trust to purchase or accept nationally significant buildings, to preserve, and to administer sites as museums. The objectives of the NTHP were twofold. Firstly it was hoped that such an organization would encourage public participation in the preservation arena. Secondly, as a private agency, it was

recognized that the Trust would be able to move more quickly than the government agency, the NPS, in emergency preservation situations.

The people associated with the NCHSB and the NTHP had a pervasive influence on the selection of buildings in their care. The NCHSB encouraged state historical organizations like the TJMF to become Affiliates of the National Council; other delegates came from patriotic organizations like the SAR, the DAR, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy; and from professional associations like the AIA, the American Society of Landscape Architects, the American Historical Association, et al. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S3 B12 Houston, NCHSB By-Laws June 1947) The NTHP, 'underwritten by the nation's wealthiest families ... accepted only those properties that came with an endowment, so the buildings it acquired were almost exclusively mansions.' (West 1999, 135) As such the NTHP's preservation activities in the early years was not representative of all Americans.

The federal government in collaboration with the NPS developed listings of important historic sites: a Registry of National Historic Landmarks was first published in 1960. It provided a descriptive listing of nationally significant sites and buildings. The criteria for selection were the now-familiar historical associations and aesthetic considerations, supplemented by new foci: cultural, political, military and social histories:

The structures or sites eligible for such evaluation are those at which events occurred that have made an outstanding contribution to, or which best represent, the broad cultural, political, economic, military, or social history of the nation; those associated importantly with the lives of outstanding historical personages, or with an important event that best represents some great idea or ideal of the American people; those that embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, or present the work of a master builder, designer, or architect; and, finally, archaeological sites of major scientific importance. (Bullock 1966, 145)

The 1960 Registry developed in scope after the Preservation Act (1966), calling for the creation of a National Register of Historic Places, was passed. The 1969 National Register included in its remit properties of state and local significance and broadened its selection from individual buildings to sites, districts, structures and objects. (Stipe 1987 a, 23)

Complementary developments in the United States preservation arena indicate the 1960s was an important decade for the heritage industry. In 1967 three new organizations were formed, confirming the importance professional development played in the evolution of the preservation movement: the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation met for the first time in July that year; the Society for Historical Archaeology was founded; and the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation was formed within the NPS.

The creation of the NPS in 1916, congressional support of the NTHP in 1949, and occasional amendments to preservation legislation by the government provided a framework within which the professional attributes of heritage preservation could develop. From the outset the fields that benefited most were history, education and conservation. In 1931 the NPS hired its first historian and in 1933 it instigated its first restoration activities. These two events led to an expansion of the Park Service's involvement in historic sites. The experience gathered from each project allowed a systematic approach to restoration to be formulated, and a professional staff of historians, researchers, and architectural historians soon developed. The approach to research practices employed by the NPS is best summarized by the actions of its Director, Arno Cammerer, who in 1938 insisted that an orderly process of research precede all restoration. He instituted an elaborate process of justification for all decisions, thereby eliminating the potential for claims of inaccuracy. (Hosmer 1981, 930)

The activities of the NPS in the 1930s contributed significantly to the development of a heritage profession. However for many years a suitable forum in which to discuss and present its methodologies was absent. An objective of the NTHP was to provide heritage professionals with accounts of its activities: 'Through its meetings, its publications and personal energies of its staff, it ...

provided accurate and scholarly information, guidance and encouragement in many quarters.’ (Whitehill 1966, 49) The NTHP not only reported on its own activities, it also provided an outlet for the NPS to disseminate its findings. The broader United States heritage field was thus able to keep up-to-date with contemporary conservation and research practice as employed by the foremost heritage agencies.

The government agency, the NPS, advanced the fields of historical and architectural inquiry, interpretation, education, and management. The other major player in heritage preservation, private preservation organizations, supported its endeavours. Like the NPS these societies adopted strict research approaches supported by historical enquiry. Their most significant contribution to the development of the heritage profession was in the field of conservation, advancing practice in architectural archaeology, historical archaeology and curatorial studies. The SPNEA set the standard: thereafter Colonial Williamsburg went on to become the most eminent private preservation organization in the United States.

### **Colonial Williamsburg and the Role of Private Heritage Organizations in the American Preservation Arena**

Dr William Archer Rutherford Goodwin and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. created the historic district of Colonial Williamsburg in 1927. These two men set a new standard in urban preservation by attempting to reconstitute an entire town. In fact the neighbourhood preserved is a contrived reality: only buildings of the colonial and federal periods were rescued; nineteenth-century or later buildings were demolished. The exterior façades and the interior ‘settings of tasteful repose’ (Seale 1979, 135) confirmed the supremacy of Colonial Revival as the contemporary mode through which American ideals could be promoted. Colonial Williamsburg, like many other Great Man house museums of the period, used the Colonial Revival style of interpretation in its quest to purge America of the social ills brought about by immigration and industrial change.

Colonial Williamsburg may have been a construct, but from the outset the activities of its architectural staff ensured that the structural aspects of buildings

were studied and conservation techniques amended according to findings. Hosmer notes 'the Williamsburg drafting room of 1928-29 became the first collaborative effort for professionals, but it was restricted almost entirely to architects.' (Hosmer 1981, 871) These architects followed a different approach to structural preservation than those of the SPNEA, where respect for the building's history dictated restoration action and interventions. Paul Buchanan, a consultant architect who worked at Colonial Williamsburg between 1949 and 1980, interpreted the actions of Colonial Williamsburg's earliest architects, like Fiske Kimball and Walter Macomber (Colonial Williamsburg's first resident architect) thus: 'They believed that in restoration you could replace many parts of a building rather than repair them ... If a piece of trim was missing or badly worn, they would replace it with new trim like the old. Quite often they would replace flooring in a building undergoing restoration with old flooring from another building of the same period.' (Freeman 1992, 33, 88)

Such practices are not accepted today, for the SPNEA approach has prevailed, but in Colonial Williamsburg's early years they dominated restoration philosophy as the aim was to present a believable image of the past. Masking such interventions, an articulated research strategy justified all architectural activities at Colonial Williamsburg. A summary of this strategy was presented in a 1950 journal article:

The first logical step was the establishment of the architectural or design element which in turn set up a proper historical research program. ... research effort must command precedence. ... As part of the research program archaeological investigation reports were written. ... A nearly forgotten architectural style had to be learned again completely. ... Lacking a suitable bibliography, the architects were forced to create their own by intense study of colonial buildings in Williamsburg and the surrounding Tidewater. Notebooks were filled, and volumes of photographs were taken. This knowledge produced skills which flowed into the working drawings aided by those two essential tools, research and archaeological reports. (1950, 31-32)

Many of the practices employed by the Colonial Williamsburg team as they set about rediscovering forgotten architectural styles were the same as those used by the HABS surveyors. In fact many HABS staff were intricately involved in restoration activity at Colonial Williamsburg. In the 1930s and 1940s the collaborative efforts of HABS and Colonial Williamsburg staff did more to professionalize the field of architectural archaeology and architectural history than any other source. Many of the architects associated with these two projects were involved in other heritage activities too and thus techniques developed at Colonial Williamsburg were implemented further afield. Colonial Williamsburg, like the NTHP, was an important centre for the dissemination of new research ideas and practices. Architects associated with the site and the Foundation itself published a number of books for public audiences, and courses hosted by Colonial Williamsburg provided a forum for 'men and women from all over the country who take responsibility for the preservation and interpretation aspect of American heritage' to exchange ideas. (Monticello Archives: TJMF S10 B54 Bear, Pamphlet Sept. 1955)

In 1941, Colonial Williamsburg's director Kenneth Chorley claimed 'Authenticity has been virtually [our] religion ... sacrifices have been offered before its altar. Personal preferences, architectural design, time, expense ... even the demands of beauty have given way to the exacting requirements of authenticity.' (Lowenthal 1998, 166) We know this was narrowly defined: buildings were demolished to ensure an ideal environment; restoration was at times invasive; and the peopling of the district was clinical and vastly unrepresentative. However the statement continues to resonate today, for it implies an understanding that research, supported by historical archaeology and architectural history, directly determines actions. It implies an objective approach to restoration that in actuality is impossible. The findings of research must always be interpreted.

The notion that authenticity is an achievable goal permeates presentations at all heritage sites today; the social history paradigm continues to encourage this objective. Conservation practice based on the latest scientific techniques play an increasingly important part in preservation activity. At Colonial Williamsburg as

at so many other heritage sites, conservation ‘provides a level of credibility or probability – in short, believability.’ (Leone 1973, 129) The one major difference social history has made to the equation is the inclusion of all classes of people into the picture.

### **Parallel Cultural and Museological Developments**

In the early twentieth-century, museum practice in the United States began to attract critical attention. Two men who contributed significantly to this critique by analyzing practical and theoretical museum issues were John Cotton Dana and Lawrence Vail Coleman. In a number of publications and lectures, they addressed the purpose and evolution of museums, and discoursed on appropriate management, interpretation, and education techniques. Both men led by example, Dana at the Newark Museum which he founded in 1909, and Coleman as director of the American Association of Museums.

Dana’s writings focused upon the generic, object-based museum. He bemoaned the lack of critical attention paid museums, assessing the focus of literature to date (1917) to be museum histories, and descriptive accounts of collections and individual objects. Dana’s writings are of interest to museum historians, but they provide little insight into house museology, house museums being noticeably absent from his definition of museums. (Peniston 1999)

Coleman, on the other hand, acknowledged the house museum genre, addressing it in his 1933 publication *Historic House Museums*. This was the first comprehensive study of the oeuvre in the United States, and it provided an early example of house museology. In the 1870s architects ‘undertook to master the exact science and history of early American houses. ... The last of these American pioneers, and an increasing number of their successors, form the ranks of present day consultants to historic house museums.’ (Coleman 1933, 55) For Coleman, it was the study of a house’s physical characteristics that determined management and conservation policy. Thus house museography was advanced by ongoing architectural research, like that undertaken by HABS and Colonial Williamsburg staff.

In *Historic House Museums* Coleman provided advice on appropriate house museum administration, and he discussed the functions of the house museum curator, a position 'essential to every historic house museum' (Coleman 1933, 36). The curator, he suggested, should be a woman of 'inquiring mind.' Why women are best suited to this role, Coleman does not articulate. In defending women as the most appropriate gender for guides, he writes 'historic houses are domestic in character and one naturally expects to find women in them.' (88) A similar interpretation of women's roles in house museum-administration was experienced at Vacluse House, where women took on roles as curatorial housekeepers; and at Monticello where they were considered the most suitable gender for guides (hostesses). In both instances the domain was considered ideally suited to a woman, because of its domestic nature.

Coleman believed the role of the curator was important. If she adhered to Coleman's advice, then the 'refined' and 'inquisitive' curator could ensure a comprehensive museum experience for the visiting public. She was advised to read all available documentary material to learn about the house and its associations. The evidence uncovered from this study was to form the basis of a report that she would refer to in all aspects of managing and interpreting the house. Coleman implies a distinction between the professional research undertaken by architects, historians and archaeologists and the instructional reading suitable for house museum curators, which alerts us to a characteristic that has come to influence our understanding of house museum interpretation. Evidence acquired through the study of physical remains was scholarly, professional, impartial, and accurate. Research of documentary sources, by its nature limited to what material was available, was subjective, and thus interpretation became open to claims of inconsistency or inaccuracy. As house museography and conservation practice developed, this notion that physical evidence was superior to documentary sources took hold. In reality, house museum professionals explore all sources, but even today the 'objective' sciences of archaeology and architectural archaeology hold more sway than examinations of subjective, personal accounts.



The creation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1945 and its museum branch, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 1946, encouraged worldwide museum professionalization and provided an international forum for the exchange of ideas and discoveries. ICOM's foundation prompted a more holistic approach to museums and preservation in the United States, encouraging practitioners to think about national standards. It is no accident that the NCHSB and the NTHP were conceived shortly after ICOM. To further encourage international standards of museum, preservation and conservation activities, a number of committees that dealt with specific cultural areas were created: the International Centre for the Study of Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) in 1956; the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1965. (It took another forty years to establish the International Committee for Historic House Museums (DemHist) in 1999.) In 1964 representatives from UNESCO, ICOM, ICCROM and the Council of Europe drafted the 'International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites' in Venice. The 'Venice Charter' provided the guiding principles of ICOMOS and since its inception has become the 'principal reference for the assessment of cultural heritage sites' in the world. (Jokilehto 1999, 289) The philosophy of the Charter follows the Morris-Ruskin-Appleton line espoused by SPAB and SPNEA:

... its aim is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents. It must stop at the point where conjecture begins, and in this case moreover any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp. The restoration in any case must be preceded and followed by an archaeological and historical study of the monument. (ICOMOS, article 9)

The principles of the Venice Charter have guided house museography and historic preservation throughout the latter decades of the twentieth century.

From the late-1960s consensus among house museum commentators has been that archaeology and documentary evidence should underlie all preservation activity.

(Alexander 1964; Bickford 1981, 1985; Hosmer 1981; Lee 1992; Lyle 1994; Schwartz, A 1967; Seale 1979) Some contemporary commentators now challenge the assertive claims of accuracy justified by a strict adherence to research. (Chappell 1989; Gable 1998; Handler 1997) As Chappell states, 'high standards of research and presentation do not necessarily ensure that the representation is entirely accurate.' (Chappell 1989, 248) There is a growing acknowledgement that contemporary preconceptions influence the way evidence is interpreted. As we have seen at Monticello, such recognition resulted in a distinction between scientific and documentary sources. Archaeological science is presented as objective; documentary and oral testimony as subjective. But science has its potential flaws too. The questions we ask of evidence are of primary importance. And the questions asked today, structured by the social history paradigm, try to be all-inclusive. Furthermore they are framed with the knowledge that we are not immune to contemporary prejudices.

### **Historic Preservation and Heritage Organizations in Australia**

In 1933 *A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of Australia. ... To the Carnegie Corporation of New York* was published. A rationale for the study was not provided in the Report, however in communications between the Carnegie Corporation and the Trustees of Vacluse House, it appears the Carnegie Corporation was interested in identifying museums within the British Empire that represented colonial life, with a view to supporting them financially. (VH Archives: VPT Min. Book 1925-1933, 250-251) The 1933 Report provided the first study of Australia's cultural heritage environment, with a catalogued history of Australia's museums and galleries, and general information on museum management matters relevant to the Australian situation. It identified the Australian trend to collect natural history and fine art, and notes the absence of history museums: Vacluse House and the Australian War Memorial (not actually opened until 1941) are presented as the only examples. The report also makes an interesting observation: the authors note that Australia's geographical isolation and the wide spread of museums prevented many museum workers from travelling to see similar institutions from which they might learn, compare, and

broaden their horizons. The authors determined 'The "isolation" of curators is one of the greatest hindrances to developments in Australia.' (Markham 1933, 57)

The Carnegie Report presented a fair assessment of the cultural heritage situation in Australia circa 1933. Vaucluse House was not only one of two history museums, it was the only house museum, though it was soon to be joined by Cook's Cottage, transported to Australia in the year this report was published. As discussed in Chapter 3, museum activities at Vaucluse House during the first few decades of its existence were a case of trial and error; no explicit museum policy existed though a recognition of the house's historical significance and focus for interpretation was stated. It would be incorrect to assume that geographical isolation was the cause of the Trustees' lackadaisical approach for they were well aware of comparable house museum developments in the United States, as testified to in Chapter 3.

I am convinced that had we such an institution (as the National Trust) in Australia the nation would already have been richer ... It is only by cherishing such treasures that we can hope to evolve a National Soul. (1987 b, 9)

The creation of Australia's first National Trust branch, the National Trust of New South Wales (NTNSW) in 1947, marked a turning point in heritage conservation. Modelled on the English National Trust, NTNSW was Australia's first historic building heritage organization. The other states established independent branches thereafter: South Australia in 1955; Victoria in 1956; Western Australia in 1959; Tasmania in 1960; and Queensland in 1963. A coordinating Australian Council of National Trusts was created in 1965 but the state branches remain sovereign to themselves. The Australian National Trust movement 'acted as an important source of communication between Australia and the U.K.' (Ireland 2001, 108) Australia's geographical isolation receding as Trust members travelled to Europe to compare and contrast National Trust activities. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the National Trust movement was virtually the sole voice in matters of preservation activity in Australia. Membership of the New South Wales, South Australian and Victorian branches of the National Trust was originally by

invitation only. Requirements were eventually relaxed, allowing anyone membership, though 'the principal offices remained in the hands of an exclusive circle of ... professionals, especially lawyers, and well-established landed families.' (Davison 1991, 18) Such practices ensured the elite of Australian society determined what was worth preserving, and accordingly only grand, colonial homes or houses of unique historical interest were considered. Like the patriotic associations and ancestor societies of nineteenth-century America who determined pre-Revolutionary and colonial America to be the ideal, the National Trust establishment ensured that colonial Australia and early statesman pioneers became an ideal representation of the nation's past.

Australia's National Trust movement grew in a post-war era of dramatic social change, marked by an enormous influx of European immigrants. As bastions of the established order, the National Trusts sought to present an ideal representation of the nation's past: they achieved this by identifying significant, colonial buildings, which they displayed according to contemporary taste and opened for public viewing.

The early museum life of one of the National Trust's most famous house museums, Como in Melbourne, Victoria, highlights 1950's Australian taste and emphasizes the National Trusts' aesthetic. Como was purchased by the NTV in 1959. It had been the home of the Armytage family, graziers and prominent members of Melbourne society, for 95 years. As the Armytages held the longest association with the house and they maintained an acceptable position in Victorian society, Como was presented as a monument to them. A homelike atmosphere was created using Armytage furniture and furnishings. 'Items considered to be "out of character", such as a number of High Victorian brass ornaments, were removed.' (Lovell 1982, 67) This revisionist approach to the collection meant Como became a monument to a mid twentieth-century design aesthetic while purporting to be a memorial to the Armytage family and the early colonial period. An all-white interior colour scheme further advanced the new aesthetic and effectively removed any trace of the Armytage family's *numen* from Como.

Interiors arranged according to notions of good taste framed by all-white colour schemes dictated house museum presentation in Australia throughout the 1950s, 1960s and early-1970s: Vacluse House adopted such an approach. But as illustrated in Chapter 3, a growing awareness of house museum issues regards conservation and interpretation practice encouraged a more focused presentation at Vacluse House during the mid-1970s. Research techniques adopted at Vacluse House were also implemented at National Trust properties. The National Trust Victoria promoted 'technical research into accurate restoration of buildings with a strong emphasis on early or original finishes' as early as the late-1960s. (Lovell 1982, 69)

In the 1950s and 1960s notions of aesthetics and connoisseurship determined the National Trusts' rationale for physical presentation and house selection. Its research into conservation practice saw the determinants for physical presentation mature, but selection and significance continued to be assessed according to prescribed architectural qualities. In 1969 the Australian Council of National Trusts' assembled a List of Buildings of National Importance. (Marsden 2000) Compiled by an expert committee primarily consisting of architects, the buildings were listed according to aesthetic criteria. Aesthetics, architectural merit, and connoisseurship still feature strongly as selection criteria for registration by the National Trusts' at the beginning of the twenty-first century. However thanks to the rise of social history and the influence of the Burra Charter, vernacular and other genres of built, industrial and environmental heritage are more prominent in their register of 280 properties. ([www.nationaltrust.org.au](http://www.nationaltrust.org.au), Sept. 2001)

The National Trusts are community-based, non-governmental organizations. All the Trusts (with the exception of Tasmania) employ professional staff who oversee management, conservation and education at Trust properties. Today a volunteer core of over 8,000 people assists the professional staff. Some of the services undertaken by National Trust volunteers are identifying, assessing and listing heritage sites; operating individual properties; advocacy and legislative monitoring; educational activities; and raising money.

The National Trusts' objective is to conserve Australia's built, cultural and natural heritage. To do this successfully and coherently, a number of policy documents have been prepared to provide procedural information for classification, conservation, management and education. 'Education of the community in heritage conservation is a key role of the National Trust.' ([www.nationaltrust.org.au](http://www.nationaltrust.org.au), Sept. 2001) To this end a series of publications, seminar programs and media campaigns are run to disseminate the Trusts' research efforts.

As noted earlier, the 1960s was an important decade for the United States heritage industry. In Australia, it was during the 1970s that interest in national history and heritage matured. This was a decade marked by national cultural pride: 'The colonial view that our possessions and endeavours were second rate was replaced by the sure knowledge that Australia's story pre-1970 was unique and worthy of conservation and preservation' asserted one of the leading conservation architects in the short-lived national magazine of the National Trust movement. (Tanner 1984, 7) The 1970s saw the creation of the Australian Historical Association in 1974; the Australian Heritage Commission (AHC) in 1975; an Australian Committee of ICOMOS in 1976; and state heritage councils/committees starting with Victoria in 1974. Australia ICOMOS drafted its own charter of guidelines, the Burra Charter, in 1978. Adopted in 1979, the Burra Charter calls for a site's significance – historical, archaeological, architectural and social – to be determined before any conservation is undertaken. Only after substantial research in all these areas has been conducted, can heritage managers prepare responsible policies and implement sound conservation plans.

The impact the Burra Charter has had upon conservation practice and heritage management in Australia cannot be overestimated, its policies influencing the actions of professional and amateur associations. But the wholehearted adoption of the Burra Charter has not been without incident, as illustrated at Susannah Place Museum. (Chapter 7) The original Charter placed great emphasis on fabric: 'all the physical material of the place'. (Australia ICOMOS 1988) In laying out guidelines for "Establishing Cultural Significance", heritage practitioners were

encouraged to collect information to inform their assessment of cultural significance. The fabric focus is pronounced in the 11 points to be considered; only passing reference is made to people, memory and history. The outcome of the adoption of the Burra Charter by Australia's heritage industry was that place/fabric focus dominated conservation practice throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The Burra Charter has recently been reviewed and updated in response to criticism from historians, interpreters and historical archaeologists who argued that memories, meanings and associations needed to be assessed too when determining cultural significance. The new Charter, released in 1999, addresses these concerns. (Australia ICOMOS 1999)

In the early-1970s the newly elected Labor government headed by Gough Whitlam instigated two national inquiries into the heritage resources of Australia. In 1974 the findings of *The Commission of Inquiry into the National Estate*, chaired by Mr Justice Hope, were published. The Inquiry found that the Commonwealth government needed to be more proactive in defending Australia's heritage. It recommended the establishment of a Heritage Commission, which would have the 'powers to list items of both natural and manmade heritage, to make recommendations to ministers on the conservation of sites and buildings in Commonwealth ownership, and to sponsor projects for interpretation and conservation of the National Estate.' (Davison 1991, 23) One of the AHC's first major tasks was the compilation and publication of an illustrated register of the National Estate, *The Heritage of Australia* (1981).

In 1975 the findings of the second national inquiry, *The Pigott Inquiry into Museums and National Collections* were published. The report *Museums in Australia, 1975* found that 'Australian governments ... [had been] largely uncaring about museums and the preservation of the material evidence from the past.' (Mulvaney 1985, 87) The Pigott Inquiry made a number of recommendations, including the call for the establishment of an Australian Museums Commission modelled on the AHC, and a proposal for a museum of Australian history. Unfortunately, the report and its recommendations disappeared

from the political agenda with the change of government in December 1975. Interestingly, Pigott's analysis of museums in Australia makes no reference to house museums. It could be argued that as built structures, house museums were considered part of the National Estate. However such an oversight shows that the potential interpretive strengths of house museums – as venues in which to explore complex social relationships and historical artefacts – were not recognized. House museums in the 1970s, despite more professional conservation and management practices, continued to be considered in terms of aesthetic value.

The procedures laid out in the Burra Charter underpin the professional activities of the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales (HHT), an organization that has contributed greatly to house museography and building conservation in Australia over the past 20-years. The HHT was created in 1980 by the NSW state government as a statutory authority within the Ministry for the Arts. From the outset the HHT adopted an explicit philosophy echoing that of the SPNEA. The Burra Charter provided the framework for conservation activities; interpretation and management policies were conditioned by the social history paradigm. The doctrine adopted by the HHT allows it to administer a variety of house museums; some other historic site museums were subsequently added to its portfolio. There are 13 museums in its care today, including Great Man house museums – Vaucluse House and Elizabeth Farm; Social History house museums – Susannah Place Museum and Meroogal; and Architectural house museums – Rose Seidler House and Elizabeth Bay House.

'Conservation, management and interpretation of the fabric, contents and grounds of buildings in its care' are the guiding principles of the HHT's rationale. (VH Archives: Property brochure RSH c.1990) Note the emphasis on the sites' physical aspects, an outcome of adopting the Burra Charter with its emphasis on fabric. The above statement tacitly implies that if a house's structure is faithfully researched then accurate interpretation of the social relationships has to follow. The 1980 legislation articulated clearly the HHT's purpose, and indicated that its policy documents were determined by contemporary conservation standards theorized in the Burra Charter. It was proposed that 'only houses distinguished by



architectural design or great historical significance should be included under the new Trust.’ (VH Archives HHT Supplementary 1981-1998; Background to HHT Legislation c.1980-1981) Despite being established in the era that saw the social history paradigm transform Australian historiography, the HHT’s initial focus was upon the great and the good.

Having determined a house’s significance, whether it be historic and/or architectural, the HHT’s objective is to ‘provide such education and cultural services in relation to those buildings as, in the opinion of the Trust, would increase public knowledge and enjoyment of those buildings and their place in the heritage of the State.’ (VH Archives: HHT Chairman’s Report, July 1980)

In its role as public educator the HHT conducts educational programs for school children and museum visitors. These range from guided tours, to public lectures, to walking tours, to curriculum-based school activities. The HHT has also curated a number of special exhibitions over the years. Located in the HHT’s properties, these exhibitions presented complementary narratives to each house’s standard interpretation. Exhibition catalogues, biographies, house-care manuals and conference proceedings have also been produced by the HHT. These publications provide valuable specialist information for house museum visitors.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the isolation identified by the authors of the 1933 Carnegie Report no longer hampers museum development in Australia. House museology in Australia is directly comparable to international experiences. Australia’s two foremost heritage organizations – the HHT and the National Trusts – reflected contemporary cultural trends when they were created, and continue to respond to and encourage cultural change today.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century both the HHT and National Trusts employ the latest conservation techniques to interpret the structure of their properties. Research in archival sources determines interpretation of the sites’ principal players. But there is a noticeable difference at HHT and NT properties that is not attributable to the historical or aesthetic value of the building. Rather it is dependent on resources. At the end of the day, the HHT is able to implement its

procedures in a thoroughly professional manner because it is well financed by the state government. The National Trusts, dependent on subscriptions from members and competitive grants, are not always able to follow through on its objectives.

### **Social History and House Museums**

A new house museum type that I classify the Social History house museum – a modification of the well-established Great Man model – has emerged during the evolution of house museums, heritage preservation and conservation practice. Both the continuously evolving Great Man house museum and the new Social History house museum genres draw on the methods and findings of social history, which from the 1970s has influenced academic and museological discourse.

Since the 1970s in the United States and the 1980s in Australia, house museums have shifted to the interpretive perspective of the social history paradigm. The social history viewpoint empowers disenfranchised members of society with a voice. In the post-World War II era subordinate actors were present in house museum interpretations, but the tendency to romanticize their lives and to avoid complex social relationships encouraged massively idealized images. Such presentations confirmed the dominant culture's social position. The early years of social history research provided new narratives to the established white, male, ruling-class view of history. Studies of neglected segments of society provided contextual support to established displays to rectify past silences. Women and ethnic minorities gained gradual inclusion into house museum narratives. In the new century disempowered groups continue to fuel research and interpretation in house museums. However, the underlying purpose of such study has shifted.

Subordinate actors have become the principal focus of interpretation at some house museums, and necessary adjuncts in the push to contextualise narratives at others. Today the voices of these previously neglected groups speak for and about themselves: they have control (or some measure of it) over their own narratives. This development from patronizing representation in the post-war era, to acknowledgement as supporting characters in the early years of the social history

paradigm, to equal status at the turn of the twenty-first century, indicates that the influence of the social history paradigm upon house museums is not static.

Like all museum genres, house museums have evolved in response to changing historiography. At Great Man house museums, social history has led to the inclusion of previously silent voices in established narratives. No longer are visitors presented with the home of a great man devoid of other household characters. More complex relationships are explored as families, servants, slaves, convicts and labourers are inserted into the house's story. The kitchen, service areas, slave, labourer and convict quarters, and other outbuildings are presented alongside the house, providing a spatial context to the social relationships between the great man and his subordinate actors. At some Great Man house museums the kitchen and other service areas have been open to view for decades, but before the social history era they were usually devoid of interpretation. The success of these physical and narrative additions is not automatic: they depend greatly on the willingness of the museum's management body to reconstruct the great man's image.

Unexpectedly, the Great Man house museum has also become a medium in which once disenfranchised groups may choose to celebrate their lives. Notably, African-Americans have adopted the principles of the great man genre as modelled at Mount Vernon over 150-years ago. Shrines to heroes of the civil rights movement resonate with the patriotic tenor of mid nineteenth-century civil religion. The social history viewpoint determines interpretation at these museums, and professional conservation standards provide accurate restorations. Nonetheless, homes like Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthplace in Atlanta, GA, are undeniably premised on hero worship.

The other significant evolution in the house museum genre has been the development of the Social History house museum. Such house museums are not dependent on an individual or a unique built structure for their rationale, but reflect the call from predominantly disenfranchised groups for venues at which to present their own voice and history. Social History house museums with their

focus on women, workers, immigrants, and/or slaves provide sites where representative and/or collective groups of ancestors are commemorated.

This last point is critical for our conception of house museums in the new twenty-first century. Ever growing professionalism and a more egalitarian approach to museum interpretation gives the illusion that the purpose of house museums has evolved too. But the reality is different.

Great Man house museums continue to be sites of hero worship now venerated with social history elements. Broader interpretation is evident; subordinate actors feature in education programs, tours and publicity material. Yet they are still secondary to the great man. As seen at Vaucluse House and Monticello, family members, convicts and slaves are acknowledged but they continue to hold a marginal place in the houses' narratives. Claims of accuracy by the HHT and the TJMF are strengthened by their adoption of social history research methods and the latest conservation techniques. But accuracy, like history, is an evolutionary construct. If we do not ask what is the underlying *raison d'être* of Great Man house museums, then subordinate actors will remain on the fringe. Great Man house museums are sites of hero worship, and it could be argued that there is no reason why this focus should alter. In extending the great man's life within a domestic and estate context, a parallel stream of ancestor worship opens up, where the heroic achievements of our collective ancestors – convicts, slaves, immigrants – are recognized and celebrated.

This is what happens at Social History house museums after all: they are venues created for the disempowered to celebrate the achievements of anonymous communities. The men and women portrayed at Social History house museums have come to symbolize the heroism of all our ancestors. The surging interest in genealogy and family history alerts us to the desire of contemporary Australians and Americans to acknowledge the achievements of their ordinary ancestors. Families identified in narratives at Social History house museums are purely interpretive; their individual endeavours symbolize those of people like them, whether it be the working class at Susannah Place Museum, women at Meroogal or immigrants at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum.

Social history, it has been said, should deal with ordinary people '*as well as*, not rather than, the elite', and with everyday activities '*no less than* world-class events.' (Carson & Carson 1983, 192) In light of this view, Great Man house museums and Social History house museums are both necessary for the provision of a complex history of domestic life, and together they allow hero worship and ancestor worship to coexist in a society that still needs to affirm the achievements of past generations. Knowing where we come from and to whom we owe our existence gives us a sense of belonging. Our lives and memories become part of the continuing historical process.

### **A Precursor to the Social History House Museum**

America's and Australia's settler-pioneers are precursors to the ancestors venerated at Social History house museums. The people honoured at living history museums, log cabins, and pioneer homesteads were ordinary women and men. Their shared experiences symbolized the pioneering achievements necessary in the creation of new nations. Men like William Connor, whose house in Fishers, IN, has become the focal point of a living history museum, Connor Prairie, replete with a working farm and relocated village, Prairietown; and Jonathan Hale, whose homestead in Bath, OH, has become the centrepiece of an open air village, are remembered for the role they played in transforming the wilderness into a habitable state. These settler-pioneers contribute to the creation myth treasured by mid nineteenth-century Americans and late nineteenth-century Australians.

The biographical history paradigm of the nineteenth century did not encourage study of the common man. Although patriotic in nature, such an historical approach venerated the deeds of the great and identifiable rather than those of the anonymous masses. However in the early twentieth-century, museums began to collect objects made by and for the common man. Recognizing that such artefacts contributed to the score of American history, museum practitioners explored alternative ways in which to display these collections. (Kulik 1989, 17) Thus was born living history museums like Connor Prairie, Hale Farm and Village, and the Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown, NY. Adopting the principles of material

culture study that relies on artefacts to reveal the 'values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions of a particular community or society' (Schlereth 1982, 3), these living history museums recreated domestic and working environments of an idealized settler-pioneer. Houses, cabins, barns and outbuildings, artefacts themselves, were restored, relocated or recreated on appropriate sites. The collections of everyday objects were displayed within and suitable narratives, centered on the stoic role these settler-pioneers played in making the nation habitable, were created.

One of the most renowned of these living history museums is the Farmers' Museum, established by the New York State Historical Association (NYSHA) in 1944. Its aim is to explore the everyday aspects of farming life through the display of commonplace objects in familiar settings. From the outset the NYSHA did not romanticize the past, rather it emphasized the hardships faced by America's settler-pioneers; barnyards smelled, work was noticeably exhausting, and the heating was inefficient.

Paradoxically, in attempting to provide a realistic image of life at the Farmers' Museum, the ordinary daily achievements of the settler-pioneer were raised to heroic status. The message was unquestionably celebratory:

Life was hard, and wresting a livelihood from the soil was especially difficult, yet our rural ancestors not only did so but left us with simple yet handsome buildings, well-made tools, and an occasional quilt or painting of surpassing beauty. Their hardiness created a civilization where only a forest had stood. (Kulik 1989, 26)

The settler-pioneers who became the focus of attention at folk museums, local history museums and pioneer homesteads in mid twentieth-century Australia were defined by the pioneer legend as developed in the 1890s. The Australian pioneer legend is a creation myth that attempts to find an honourable, if not glorious, Australian origin unconnected with the realities of the convict settlement of Australia. A century after European colonization, and 50-years after the cessation of convict transportation (in the East), selective memories were engaged to

memorialize the honest labour of farming the land and making it productive. By discreetly avoiding the issue of when and how the workers of Australia arrived, and concentrating on the nation-building consequences of their energy in the bush, a primal Australian character was constructed. He was purified by hard work and proved his fitness to own the land by his endurance of nature's vicissitudes – stoic rather than actively heroic, he was at least not criminal, in a land where the hated stain of convictism generated a great historic silence.

This pioneer legend underpinned the rationale for preserving and interpreting one of Australia's earliest pioneer museums, Blundell's Cottage in Canberra. Blundell's Cottage is a humble stone building, situated on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin in direct sight of the old and new Parliament houses. Its prominent location amongst Australia's monuments to nationhood – the National Gallery, the High Court of Australia, the National Science Centre, and the National Library – serves to illustrate a continuous evolution from early pioneers to contemporary nation builders. As the capital grows and links with Australia's pioneering past fade, the cottage's significance increases.

Administered by the Canberra & District Historical Society (CDHS), Blundell's Cottage was officially opened as a museum in 1964. At the opening ceremony, the Minister of the Interior, the Honorable J.D. Anthony MP, acknowledged the achievements of Australia's pioneers and our need to venerate them thus:

These people have not been spectacular heroes as individuals, but as a group. They laid the foundation of a Great Nation, one which we have good reason to be proud of each day.

The life of these people differed greatly from ours. The way they lived – their homes, their cooking habits, their domestic work, lighting, transport, furniture. These are fascinating exhibits to examine. Their industry, the type of machinery and equipment they used, the way they tilled the land, and the commerce of those days – prices, wages, records, stock and crop production – all are worthy to be preserved and examined with pride as years go by.

Here in Blundell's farmhouse is a wonderful exhibition – a museum containing all of these things – it is the symbol of hundreds and thousands of unrecorded pioneering families, just like the Campbells, Ginns, Blundells and the Oldfields, who made this Nation. (CDHS Archives: News & Publicity files, 12.3.1964)

The material culture approach to historical inquiry dictated the significance of the cottage and its outbuildings. The collection of assembled objects complemented this intent.

Although the legends have specific significance to each nation, a common thread is identifiable at all the living history museums, log cabins and pioneer homesteads thus marking them as precursors to the Social History house museum. They all venerate the ordinary woman and man. America's and Australia's settler-pioneers were heroes. Not great men, but worthy ancestors. They were honoured for being the first, the earliest, the oldest. These settler-pioneers transformed the common man into a hero, and thus the rationale of historic sites like Farmers' Museum and Blundell's Cottage is ancestor worship.

In mid twentieth-century America and Australia honouring the achievements of settler-pioneers was undertaken by local or regional societies. Individual tales had resonance to a specific place. Yet these stories merged to create a national picture. Combined they provided symbolic reminders that modern society was built upon the enduring achievements of settler-pioneers. Today, perceptions of settler-pioneers' struggles against adversity are viewed through a more contextual, social history lens. Themes of settlement, contact history and indigenous history, have led to a reassessment of pioneers in America's and Australia's past. The settler-pioneer museums have not disappeared with the advent of the Social History house museum. They continue to provide insight into our nations' pasts, complementing the endeavours of the new genre.



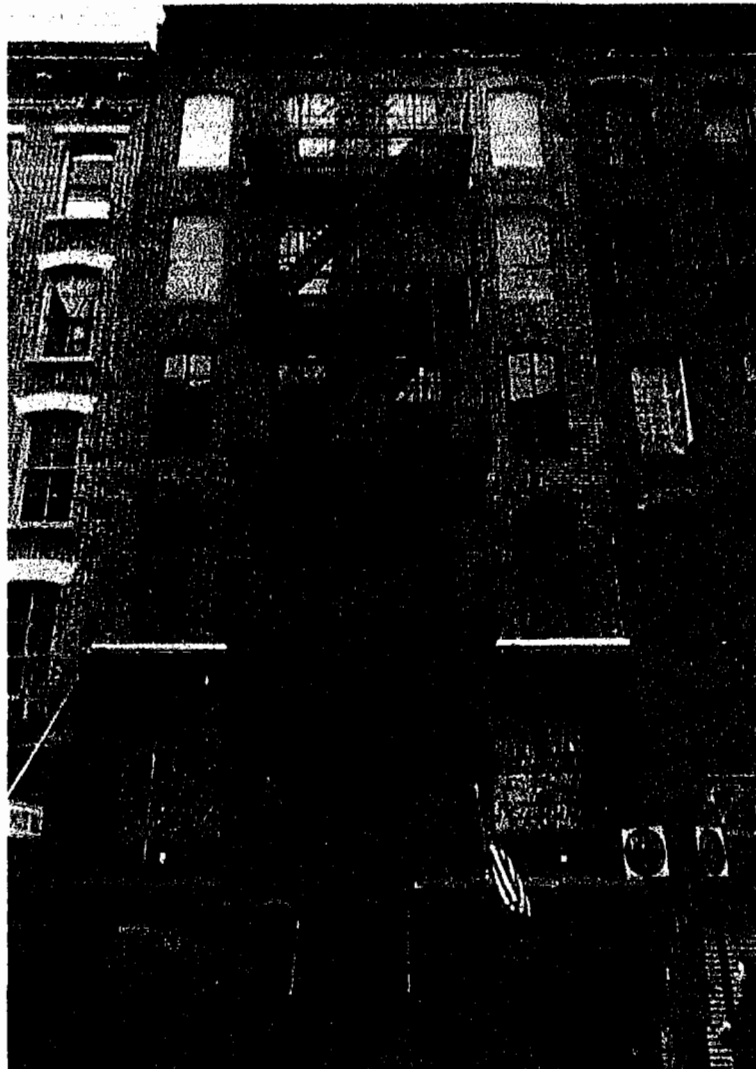


Illustration 14: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum,  
97 Orchard Street, New York City  
(Photograph © Benjamin Epps, LESTM)

## **Chapter 6 Evolution of a Genre: Lower East Side Tenement Museum**

### **Introduction**

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum (LESTM) located on Manhattan Island, NY, is more than a house museum. It is an organization with three sites – the tenement building at 97 Orchard Street; a shop front and museum at 90 Orchard Street, and offices at 66 Allen Street – offering a range of educational and

interpretive services. These include walking tours of the lower east side; ESL classes for new immigrants; plays exploring immigrant experiences in the lower east side during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries; the *Tenement Times*, a newspaper that presents the museum's ongoing research and records the oral histories of past and present residents of the lower east side; video displays; temporary exhibitions by contemporary artists; a library of archival resources documenting immigrant life; and apartment tours, which are the most visible aspect of the LESTM's activities. These tours have been conducted at 97 Orchard Street since 1994. Their structure and content provide an ideal conduit for presenting the LESTM's rationale:

To promote tolerance through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a gateway to America. (Abram 1991, 12)

The immigrant experiences presented are those of stoic individuals who achieved success in their new land. The implied moral is that nineteenth- and twentieth-century immigrants made invaluable contributions to the fabric of contemporary America, as will today's new arrivals if given the opportunities: 'through confrontation with ancestors who are held dear, Americans might be moved to a kind of national conversation about contemporary immigrants.' (Abram 2001, 4) The LESTM seeks to shape national opinion and social consciousness by providing interpretive narratives that offer instruction by example.

The successful implementation of the LESTM's rationale relies upon the families and individuals identified to represent the myriad of immigrant experiences. A highly structured research program employing the most current historical methodology discovered a number of families who had resided at 97 Orchard Street. The availability of documentary and material sources and occasional oral testimony, determined which families were suitable for interpretation. Once identified, the life stories of these families provided the evidence for interpreting tenement living and immigrant life. The evidence also determined how these families' apartments should be recreated, and the structure and content of the guided tour. The fully recreated apartment tours were the culmination of years of

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campaigning by the LESTM's creator, Ruth Abram. Abram recognized that tenement buildings resonated with memories, public and private, past and present, but it was some years before her idea to use a physical location to present these connections was realized. The gradual development of the LESTM's programs bears much resemblance to the "Museum in the Making" approach trialled by the HHT at Susannah Place Museum. (Chapter 7)

In 1984 Ruth Abram, a social, civil rights and feminist activist, who had worked for the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, established the Lower East Side Historic Conservancy (LESHC). A series of plays and tours exploring Jewish immigrant experiences were conducted throughout the lower east side by the Conservancy over the next few years. In 1986-1987 Abram and fellow Conservancy creator Marsha Hurst, wrote *The Tenement Proposal*, an application for funding that would enable the LESHC to 'gather information and to identify individuals necessary to plan and then implement a Living History Museum which features a re-creation of Jewish tenement life on the lower east side of Manhattan (19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) as well as a center for research and education on issues relating to that experience.' The proposal identified the LESHC's two objectives:

... to develop an exciting vehicle through which to convey the historical, social and cultural aspects of Jewish history in America; and to establish a center which stimulates research and education involving scholars representing a wide array of fields and interests. (LESTM Archives: Abram 1986-87)

The Historic Conservancy was legally chartered by the State of New York as a private, non-profit museum – the Lower East Side Tenement Museum (LESTM) – in 1988. At this time the focus was still upon Jewish immigration, but there was a mood among the museum's Trustees to broaden this remit. Trustee 'Mr Crotty expressed the hope that the museum programs would soon expand to include groups in addition to Eastern European Jews. ... [he] suggested that more effort be put into focusing on other religious and ethnic backgrounds'. (LESTM Archives: Minutes, 8.8.88) Other trustees encouraged Crotty in his appeal. His

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suggestion was further supported by the findings of research conducted by the new museum's staff, which identified many more ethnic groups aside from Jews who called the lower east side home in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. Thus the mission grew to encompass all immigrant experiences. Interestingly, Abram has erased the early mission of the LESHHC and LESTM from her story. She now interprets her intentions in rhetoric that has dominated the museum's rationale throughout the 1990s:

In the early 1980s, I set out to establish a memorial to the vast majority of citizens who lived in neither a log cabin or a mansion, but rather in a room or two in a city tenement; a memorial to immigrant and migrant people who lived modest, unassuming lives in the city; a memorial to the nation's urban pioneers. I did it to set the records straight. (Abram 1998, 2)

The LESTM is not simply 'a memorial to the nation's urban pioneers'. It is also a monument to Ruth Abram, who justifiably accepts the credit for its existence. It is a museum very much of its time, embracing the principles of the social history paradigm of house museums. In the article "A Museum Grew in Me", Abram writes that it was the injustices she had experienced first hand that fuelled the museum. As a child growing up in 1950s and 1960s Georgia she had witnessed segregation; as a woman she had been discriminated against throughout her life; and as the daughter of a woman who had converted to Judaism, she was considered a non-Jewish Jew. Abram, as witness to and subject of discrimination, came to believe that history was the means through which the disempowered could find voice. She advocated that an understanding of our collective past allowed society to prepare strategies to deal with the present. Abram identified immigrants as one of the largest disenfranchised groups in the United States, past and present. She ascertained that the establishment of a tenement museum would enable her to put her ideals – using history to influence contemporary action – into practice.

The tenement building represented the common ground of immigrants from everywhere. Through it, one could discuss the history of immigration and immigrant life, the role of reformers, of government, the history of

housing and our changing views as to what was an acceptable life style. But most of all, through a tenement museum, the general public, old and young alike, could be invited to consider this question: How will we be one nation and at the same time enjoy, appreciate and certainly not be afraid of the profound differences we bring to the table based on background? (Abram 1991, 12)

The Tenement Museum was to provide a venue in which the achievements of America's urban pioneers could be held up for veneration. The mood was celebratory. The Tenement Museum was to be a shrine to America's shared ancestors, representing a new voice for civil religion in the twenty-first century; one in which ordinary, humble people are celebrated as national creation figures alongside great men.

The LESTM demonstrates that civil religion is still relevant in the social history era; the principles of civil religion as created in mid nineteenth-century America – hero worship, pilgrimage and contemplation of collective purpose – still inform house museum rationale. Social history has encouraged a shift away from recognizing great men as the only foundation heroes towards a more generic kind of ancestor worship. This has led to a new kind of pilgrimage, one in which descendants of ordinary people seek confirmation of the contribution their ancestors made to society. The lives of these humble nation builders are presented as exemplars for contemporary Americans; their experiences are used to shape social consciousness. It is evident from Abram's statements and the nature of the apartment tours, that the LESTM has adopted the principles of civil religion as reinterpreted in the social history era.

The LESTM is very much a creation of its time, its mission and interpretive rationale dependent upon the principles espoused by social historians. The social history paradigm afforded a cultural environment that encouraged the creation of house museums that focused upon disenfranchised groups of society. The LESTM is among the forerunners of Social History inspired house museums in the United States. Its creation complements the growing trend for urban preservation which calls for the rescue of landscapes, neighbourhoods and ordinary buildings. In other

words, sites that embody symbolic memories for groups largely ignored by preservationists in the past, notably African-Americans, women and ethnic minorities. Notable examples are the Black Heritage Trail in Boston, MA; the Women's Rights National Historic Park at Seneca Falls, NY; and Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, CA. (Hayden 1995)

### **A Biography of 97 Orchard Street**

In 1988, with the new museum charter and articulated purpose – to represent all facets of immigrant life in a tenement museum – Abram and a colleague, Anita Jacobson, set about searching for office space from which to run the LESTM. They rented one of the storefronts at 97 Orchard Street, and thus by chance stumbled across the perfect site for their museum: an unaltered, pre-Old Law constructed tenement building.

Lucas Glockner, a tailor of German origin, erected the tenement building at 97 Orchard Street in 1863-64. The building comprised 22 apartments, 6 outhouses, and two commercial shops. It is estimated that at least 7,000 individuals from over 20 countries lived there during the building's residential life until 1935, including Glockner and his family. 97 Orchard Street was built during the first major wave of tenement construction in New York City. Today the physical structure exhibits scars from alterations that were either the result of general improvements, or implemented in response to reform laws. The most significant alterations were made following the 1901 "New Law". This law required every apartment to have at least one window in each room allowing access to light and air; internal water closets; and a skylight in the hallway to illuminate the stairs. In 1929 "The Multiple Dwelling Act" was passed. This law stipulated that the number of water closets per floor match the number of apartments, and that the internal staircase be made fireproof. Rather than comply with the 1929 law, the then owners of 97 Orchard Street, Gottlieb and Irving Helpem, boarded up the residential floors in 1935. They continued to rent the four storefronts (the first floor apartments having been converted to shops in 1905). Thus when the LESTM opened up the

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residential floors in 1988, 52 years later, a rich architectural archaeology had been preserved.

In 1990, the LESTM obtained a ten-year lease on 97 Orchard Street; the option to purchase the property at a later date was included in the lease agreement. In 1993, the LESTM launched a capital campaign to raise \$3 million for the purchase, restoration and renovation of 97 Orchard Street. This campaign was marketed with the slogan, "Honor Our Urban Pioneers". In 1994, a contract to purchase the tenement building for \$750,000 was signed. That same year the first recreated apartments were completed and the first tours of the tenement house given.

In the interim period – 1988 to 1994 – the LESTM offered a series of programs that gave the museum a local, state and national presence. In line with the contemporary trend for urban preservation, a Lower East Side Black History Trail and accompanying guidebook was launched in 1988. A series of plays and musicals were scripted and performed in the storefront area at 97 Orchard Street and at local schools. An exhibition of photographs depicting the lower east side in the early-1900s was curated and hung in the storefront. These activities provided an outlet for the museum's activities while the apartments were being restored. In late 1993, a museum shop was opened at 90 Orchard Street. The photography exhibition and the "Urban Log Cabin", a scale-model dolls house of 97 Orchard Street with rooms furnished to 1870 and 1915, were exhibited in the shop. Space for a theatre was also provided. The museum's office and archive also moved at this time, preparing the way for the opening of the tenement building and apartment tours.

The LESTM tours start outside the building on Orchard Street. A brief history of the area, from pre-European settlement to Glockner's purchase of the land from the Dutch Reformed Congregation in 1863, is provided. Visitors then proceed into the first-floor entrance hallway. When everyone is inside, the front door is closed and the lights turned off. In this dark and dingy environment the docent asks visitors to contemplate the residents' living conditions at 97 Orchard Street in the late nineteenth-century when there was no light, heating, plumbing, or hot and cold running water. As a way to introduce the museum's social history-

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determined research method, visitors are encouraged to imagine what tenants might have thought of the building, the docent explaining 'it's one thing social historians try to analyze.' (LESTM Archives: Tour script, September 1994) The emphasis on the museum's research approach to understanding the tenement's structure and residents' lives, underpins the tenor of the tour. From the outset, visitors are encouraged to think like social historians, to examine the physical evidence for insight into the residents' emotional responses.



Illustration 15: The Ruin apartment remains in 'as found' condition, demonstrating the possibilities for visitors to read the evidence of architectural archaeology (Photograph © Judith Saltzman, LESTM)

From the hallway, visitors ascend the stairs to the first apartment of the tour: the Ruin. This apartment has been left as found when the LESTM moved their offices to 97 Orchard Street in 1988. In the Ruin, visitors are introduced to the now obligatory research approach for any credible house museum: architectural archaeology. Structural changes that occurred throughout the buildings residential history are plain to see. The docent identifies the changes made in response to reform laws: 'a window cut into the partition wall to let light and ventilation into interior rooms, a sink added with the installation of indoor plumbing, and an airshaft to ventilate new hall toilets.' (Hardy 1997) Visitors are encouraged to explore the material evidence of this apartment and consider how it would have



affected living conditions and therefore tenement life. A reporter writing of the LESTM's plans to include such a 'pure' space on the tour highlighted a trend in current preservation. That is that truth to structural integrity accentuates a museum's claim of credibility. As the reviewer wrote, presenting the apartment as found 'would preserve dust, and in dust there is authenticity.' (Kaufman 1994, C21)

In the original 1994 tours, visitors were then introduced to the Gumpertz and Baldizzi families. Their apartments have been recreated to illustrate their lives and experiences of tenement living. In the Gumpertz apartment, recreated to around 1883, visitors are introduced to Nathalie, an immigrant of German Jewish origin who, having been abandoned by her husband Julius, supported her family by working as a seamstress from the front room of her home. Visitors are once again encouraged to 'read' the material evidence of the apartment. They are also introduced to another avenue of research: the examination of contemporary documentary evidence. The LESTM's reliance upon primary documents for the recreation of Nathalie's story is stressed throughout the Gumpertz apartment tour. A genealogist on the research team uncovered the Gumpertz family history. Supplementing the evidence with other primary sources (census records, death certificates) the interpretive team was able to recreate a comprehensive account of the Gumpertz family life. Two of Nathalie's and Julius's great grandsons were identified from the research efforts and contacted by the LESTM. They were keen to participate in the museum project. Both donated furnishings to the display, thus engendering a link between the present and the past.

The progress of tenement and immigrant history is continued as visitors move to the Baldizzi apartment, recreated to eviction day, 1935. This was the home of Rosaria, Adolpho, Josephine and Johnny, a Sicilian family who entered the United States illegally via Canada, and who during the Depression years relied on Home Relief to survive. In this apartment the 1905 structural alterations are evident.

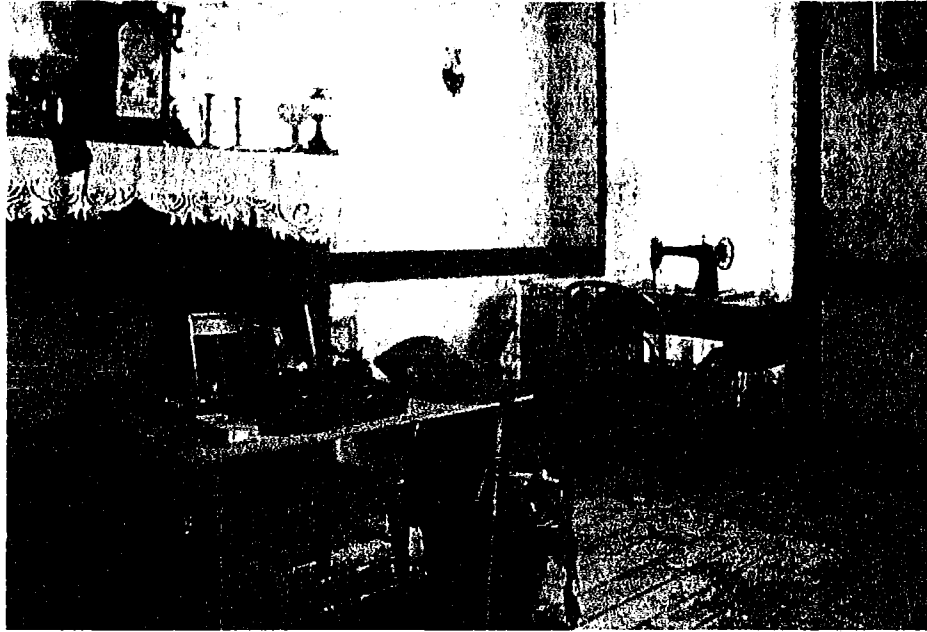


Illustration 16: The front room of the Gumpertz Apartment, presented as Nathalie's work space (Photograph © Bruce Buck, LESTM)



Illustration 17: The kitchen looking through to the front room, the Baldizzi Apartment, the recreation based on oral testimony provided by Josephine Esposito (Photograph © Steve Brosnaham, LESTM)

The physical changes demanded by the 1929 laws are identified by the docent, and the landlord's decision not to comply given as reason for the building's

closure and the Baldizzi's eviction. The use of oral history and memory to inform interpretation and recreation is introduced to visitors at this stage. Josephine Esposito, nee Baldizzi, was still alive when the apartment tours were being designed and willingly recounted her childhood memories of life at 97 Orchard Street. She was also able to describe in detail her family's living arrangements. These recollections were transcribed and recorded, so that today Josephine guides the visitor through the Baldizzi apartment. Josephine's memories provide a very human element to the apartment tours. When the residential apartments of the tenement building were opened to the public in 1994, this was the extent of the guided visit. In 1998 a third, recreated apartment was added to the tour. After leaving the Baldizzi apartment visitors are taken to meet the Rogarshevskys, a Jewish family from Telz, Lithuania. The year is 1918, and the family is sitting Shiva for the patriarch Abraham, the traditional mourning ceremony in which the family of the departed stay in their home for seven days, reflecting upon the life of the deceased. During this period the mourners receive visitors who offer their condolences and remember good deeds performed by the departed. In this apartment, primary sources ensure that the story presented is accurate. As the Gumpertz and Baldizzi narratives tackle issues such as working single mothers, illegal immigration and welfare, so too the Rogarshevsky scenario allows for the examination of social and cultural issues: Abraham's death due to tuberculosis; expectations placed upon families by their faith; and community support networks.

The LESTM has plans to add to the tour. A nineteenth-century sweatshop is currently being investigated. The museum's researchers identified three sweatshops that operated at 97 Orchard Street from the 1890s: a broom maker, a cigar manufacturer and a dressmaker. It transpires the dressmaker, Henry Levin, lived at 97 Orchard Street between 1891/92 and 1900, and the LESTM hold copies of his children's birth certificates in its archives. Thus his business has become the focus of the next recreation. Research is also underway to discover more about Irish families that resided at 97 Orchard Street. Thirteen such families have been identified to date.

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There is a fourth recreated apartment at 97 Orchard Street, but it is not offered on the regular tenement tour. The “Tenement Family Apartment”, opened in 1997, is a hands-on environment developed especially for school groups and families with children. Its focus is the Confino family, Sephardic Jews from Greece who resided at 97 Orchard Street in 1915. Using first person interpretation, visitors are welcomed to the apartment by Victoria, the Confino’s youngest daughter. Taking on the role of recently arrived immigrants who have come directly from Ellis Island to the lower east side, she introduces visitors to their new surroundings. She offers suggestions on how to make their new home comfortable, and shows them how her family managed to accommodate 11 people in the three-room apartment. The program, “After Ellis: Life in a Tenement”, was developed by the LESTM and Ellis Island staff. The outcome of this collaborative project is an Immigrant Heritage Trail that allows the LESTM to preserve and interpret a variety of immigrant experiences as per their mission, and to visually extend the experiences of immigrants by placing the tenement building into a broader locality context.

### **Urban Pioneers**

The tenement apartment tours and the tenement family apartment focus upon real families; the interpretive narratives are based on actual events. Artefacts and furnishings displayed in the apartments are not familial heirlooms, but have been collected to provide visual support to the narratives. The interpretive intent of the LESTM is to tell stories that broach social issues. Thus it explores among other things poverty, welfare, private charity, single mothers, prejudice, illegal immigration, child labour and death. The families identified personify immigrant experiences of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. 97 Orchard Street is identified not because it is a unique tenement building, but because it represents the living conditions of over 75 percent of New Yorkers at the turn of the century. With such statistics, the LESTM argue that the majority of Americans today trace their roots to the municipal frontier:

Most Americans are either immigrants or descendents of immigrants. This powerful experience of dislocation, relocation, and re-invention has

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shaped our national character. Since the experience of immigration is so widely shared, it can be used as a foundation for building a sense of common national purpose. (LESTM Archives: Abram 1999)

The thousands of people who passed through the doors of 97 Orchard Street were urban pioneers. Like their frontier brethren, they were 'strong in mind, body and determination, ready to put up with hardship because they believed in themselves and their new country.' (Rosenthal 1996, A25) Being referred to in such terms illustrates that these 'urban pioneers' have become necessary contributors to birth-of-the-nation narratives. However preservationists and museum personnel have largely ignored them and their homes. In arguing for the LESTM's establishment, Abram stressed that the nation's representational narrative was incomplete, focusing as it did upon great men and rural pioneers. She claimed this picture bore no relevance to the majority of Americans who live in urban environments. Abram believed that a museum exploring the lives and housing of immigrants would balance the uneven historical record.

Since 1920, we have been an urban nation, yet you would never know it by visiting our country's preserved spaces. Through them, we have honored our rural past, preserving many examples of log cabins, farm houses and sod huts. And we have paid tribute to the contributions of our gentry, saving countless examples of their stately mansions. These efforts were and are worthy, but they do not tell the majority story. For that, and to furnish the historical consciousness so critical to our national sense of self, we need a tenement. (Abram 1998)

In order to set the record straight, Abram established the LESTM, found a suitable tenement, and created a 'living memorial to those uncelebrated migrants who settled in cities and, without ever putting hand to plough, also built this great nation.' (LESTM 1993, 1)

The establishment of the LESTM was firmly rooted in the social history paradigm of museum practice as Abram acknowledged in her 1989 Founding Day address:

The Tenement grows out of the social history movement which holds that the history of “ordinary” people is worthy of inclusion in the historical record, and even that record can not be fully understood if they are excluded. (LESTM Archives: Abram, 1988)

At an American History Workshop (AHW) held in 1990, the importance of social history upon the broader museum community and house museum sector was noted. The report provides an historical context for social history’s development and relevance to museums, identifying a trend in the New Deal and post-World War II era to celebrate the history of the common man. A paper delivered at an American Association for State and Local History annual meeting in 1970 is also referenced in the 1990 AHW report because the author noted an absence of house museums focusing upon ordinary life. The AHW recognized that in identifying a museum function for a tenement building, the LESTM was making ‘an important and adventurous step in the public awareness and expression of our nation’s and city’s diverse social and cultural history.’ (LESTM Archives: AHW Report, 1990)

The emphasis upon ordinary people, and the use of terms like ‘urban pioneer’ and ‘pioneer log cabin’ illustrates that the social history movement as understood by Abram and her team is a direct descendent of the settler-pioneer model. Both cultivate more democratic, inclusive portraits of society and both are celebratory in nature. The collective achievements of ordinary people are raised alongside the great men allowing their contribution to the national character to be acknowledged and duly venerated.

We honor, for the very first time in a home setting, the struggles, strategies, and triumphs of our urban, working class, immigrant forbears. We honor them in the most profound way possible, by telling their stories truly. (LESTM Archives: Apartment dedication, 3.10.94)

As such a high percentage of Americans today trace their ancestry back to these ordinary, urban pioneers, then the celebratory nature of the LESTM’s *raison d’être* can be viewed as ancestor worship. The LESTM provides a new form of pilgrimage site, a new type of hero to worship and a new collective purpose to

contemplate; illustration that civil religion has responded to the demands of the social history paradigm, and continues to provide the ideology of house museums with historic associations.

While the LESTM presents a form of celebratory history, it does so with an especially late twentieth-century vision of what the nation should be. Its mission is directed by the social history paradigm; its practice is determined by professional research and conservation techniques: architectural archaeology, historical archaeology, primary and secondary documentary sources and oral testimony. The objective of such an approach is to present an accurate image of immigrant life, one that is difficult to contradict in light of all the evidence. The acid test of such commitment to socially inclusive museum practice is that if information challenging current assumptions is discovered, interpretations will be altered accordingly.

### **The LESTM's Place in Contemporary United States Culture**

The LESTM has received applause and financial support from private enterprise, the federal government and the museum sector. Its activities have been analyzed by a number of professional heritage organizations – Museum Assessment Program (MAP), NPS, AHW, NTHP, Carnegie Corporation – whose assessments signpost cultural change in the United States museum field. What the analysis highlights is an increasing commitment to provide outlets in which disempowered groups can have their histories heard. Museums are recognized as providing a suitable medium for the dissemination of such narratives. Especially evocative are museums established at sites in which a variety of histories occurred. They embody the memories of many, and are recognized as being culturally and nationally significant.

The tenement building is a 'quintessential symbol of the urban, working class, poor and immigrant experience' (LESTM 1996) and the efforts of the LESTM to preserve such a site parallels the growing recognition that metropolitan areas in which often disenfranchised groups reside have important histories to tell. The LESTM's recognition and promotion of tenement buildings as emblematic

symbols of municipal America received encouragement from national heritage organizations. 97 Orchard Street was the first tenement building to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992, alongside such notable estates at Mount Vernon and Monticello. Abram assesses ‘this symbolic recognition of the grit and determination of our nation’s urban, working class immigrants ... [as] long overdue. Their collective triumph over often unimaginable odds is every bit as deserving of accolades as the victories of our rural pioneers.’ (Abram 1993 a) Placing a vernacular building like the tenement at 97 Orchard Street onto the National Register illustrates a representative shift in values regarding historical association and national significance. Collective experiences of largely anonymous folk now merit the same historical respect as great men. They are all heroes of the nation.

The National Park Service (NPS) and the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) recognizing the importance of the LESTM’s mission, now collaborate with the museum. In October 1993 the United States Congress mandated a special study to determine the tenement museum’s social significance and to ascertain whether the NPS would benefit from an affiliation with the LESTM. A representative from the NPS, Mr Alderstien, explained that it was the Park Service’s goal ‘to preserve aspects of American heritage, such as military or social themes of national significance. [It was recognized that] urban, immigrant, working class heritage ... [was] not adequately represented’ at that time. The newly appointed director of the NPS, Roger Kennedy, was also aiming to expand the Park Service’s image and reach. According to Alderstien’s assessment, Kennedy was ‘looking for challenge and controversy – qualities the Tenement Museum can offer.’ (LESTM Archives: Minutes, 17.6.93) The NPS study ‘concluded that the Tenement Museum was the best site in the nation from which to interpret the history of the urban, working-class, immigrant experience, and recommended an affiliation with the Museum’, which came into effect in October 1993. As an Affiliated Area, the museum remained a private, non-profit organization, but became eligible for federal funding. It also enabled collaboration with other NPS sites, hence the association with the Ellis Island Museum in the



creation of “After Ellis: Life in a Tenement” and the Immigrant Heritage Trail. (LESTM 1995)

In 1998, the LESTM signed an Historic Site Agreement with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The agreement requires the LESTM to notify the NTHP of any proposed structural, interpretive or managerial changes. According to the terms of the agreement, once notification of proposed changes have been made, the Trust reviews the museum’s proposed plans and then decides whether or not it wants to participate in the planning process. The primary benefit of the agreement for the LESTM is the ability to draw on the expertise of the NTHP’s professional consultants, supplementing its own research efforts. The LESTM has not lost its autonomy by signing this agreement. It still maintains control of its operations and determines final outcomes.

In a Museum Assessment Program (MAP) report of 1992, the assessor Gary Kulik foresaw the LESTM’s ‘potential to be not just another new museum, but to be part of a watershed moment in the history of museums.’ He was referring to a wider social role for museums, as envisaged by the LESTM’s objective to promote tolerance and provide historical models of perseverance against adversity. The tenement building at 97 Orchard Street provided an appropriate vehicle for the LESTM’s mission. The histories uncovered through social history-inspired research policies are sympathetically presented in the apartment tour narratives providing illustrations of American immigrant experiences in all their harshness. Tolerance is promoted by likening the experiences of the Gumpertz, Baldizzi, and Rogarshevsky families to those of current immigrants. The uneasy steps to becoming American at the turn of the twentieth century have reached the threshold of public consciousness as an example of heroic ancestral achievement. Whether the LESTM has successfully achieved its mission is hard to measure, though national recognition from the NPS and the NTHP illustrates it is having an impact. These affiliations give the LESTM a national platform from which to challenge the notion of museums’ role in society, ‘to place ... [museums] at the center rather than on the periphery of the examination of questions central to democracy.’ (LESTM Archives: Minutes, 10.6.93) To this end Abram has formed

the “International Coalition of Historic Site Museums” with six international institutions<sup>12</sup> who share a common philosophy: ‘that the primary purpose of preserving and interpreting historic sites is to offer them as tools for addressing contemporary problems.’ (LESTM Archives: Minutes, 31.8.99) By using history and presenting it at historic sites, social history-inspired museums like the Tenement Museum can bear witness to the dark sides of history, honour the victims and survivors, and educate modern visitors.

### Conclusions

The tenement building at 97 Orchard Street has been preserved for the many emotive, personal histories it contains within its walls. It is not a unique structure; rather it represents the hundreds of similar buildings constructed in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. The Gumpertz, Baldizzi, Rogarshevsky, and Confino families, identified because their stories allow non-traditional museum issues – welfare, single parenting, poverty, illegal immigration – to be interpreted, are also representative. This interrelationship between unspectacular architecture and ordinary families is the lynchpin of Social History house museums.

The ideology of civil religion as reinterpreted in the social history era underpins the LESTM’s actions. Of primary importance to the museum’s rationale is ancestor worship. The experiences of largely anonymous groups of immigrants are held up for veneration and example. At the LESTM historically accurate interpretive narratives have been fashioned to shape contemporary opinions about social issues. The mission of the LESTM is politically motivated; Abram’s belief being that the whole of society benefits when tolerance is practiced.

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<sup>12</sup> These institutions are: District Six Museum, Capetown, South Africa; the Workhouse, Nottingham, England; the Liberation War Museum, Dacca, Bangladesh; the Ghetto Museum, Terezin, Czech Republic; the Gulag Museum, Perm, Russia; and the Womens’ Rights National Historical Site, Seneca Falls, United States.

One way to encourage tolerance is to provide heroes with human frailties we all recognize. This has been the LESTM's approach to the interpretation of the Gumpertz, Baldizzi, Rogarshevsky, and Confino families. Their stories are complex, their characters flawed, but the LESTM believe only honest representations – a warts and all history – will do them justice.

The LESTM does not romanticize the past but it does celebrate the stoicism of its heroes. At the LESTM America's collective ancestors are mythologized, memorialized and held up for veneration like their great man predecessors.



Illustration 18: The Susannah Place Museum, 58-64  
Gloucester Street  
(Photograph © Richard Gange, HHT)

## Chapter 7 Evolution of a Genre: Susannah Place Museum

### Introduction

Susannah Place  
Anno Domini  
1844

These words are carved on the façade of a row of four attached terrace houses, owned by the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority (SHFA) and managed by the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales (HHT) as the Susannah Place Museum. Located on Gloucester Street in The Rocks, a district situated on the western shores of Sydney Cove in inner Sydney, Susannah Place offers insight into the private domain of working-class families from 1844 to 1990, and as a relic of a once thriving port community encapsulates the public memories of the district. From its early years as an area noted for its convict and emancipist population, the demographics of The Rocks grew to encompass labourers and artisans of the 'lower orders' from England and Ireland, some middle-income clerks and civil servants, and a minority of wealthy merchants and business (wo)men. (Karskens 1997) By 1844 when Susannah Place was built, The Rocks

was the most densely populated area in Sydney, its community largely working-class people whose livelihood was dependent on the wharves at the bottom of the rocky crags.

1844 census records show Edward and Mary Riley as the owners of Susannah Place. They were Irish immigrants who had arrived in Sydney in 1838, accompanied by their 19-year old niece Susan (or Susannah) Stere. The Rileys resided at No. 62 Susannah Place, the third in a row of four houses, numbered today 58 – 64; the end house, No. 64, fronted a corner shop. The houses are of double storey, brick construction. They were built with two rooms per floor. All had basement kitchens and outdoor privies. The tenants' occupations over the years have included grocers, mariners, composers, bakers, shipwrights, policemen, painters and lodging housekeepers.

In 1874 Mary Riley died, leaving houses 62 and 64 to Susannah's daughter, Mary Anne Finnegan and houses 58 and 60 to the Anglican Church. After an outbreak of the plague in 1900, the New South Wales government, under the *Darling Harbour Wharves Resumption Act 1900*, resumed Susannah Place and much other housing stock in The Rocks, deemed 'slums'. Hundreds of houses considered uninhabitable were demolished, but Susannah Place was not. It continued to provide housing for the area's working-class population; the tenancy pattern unchanged as Susannah Place was administered by a series of government authorities: the Sydney Harbour Trust 1901-1936, the Maritime Services Board 1936-1968, the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (SCRA) 1968-1988, and the Sydney Cove Authority (SCA) 1988-1990.<sup>13</sup> 1990 marked the end of Susannah Place's residential life, Ellen and Dennis Marshall, occupants of No. 62 deciding to leave The Rocks in this year.

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<sup>13</sup> The SCA continued as Susannah Place's owner-administrators until 1999, when responsibility for the museum was transferred to the newly created Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority (SHFA).

Few alterations have been made to Susannah Place over its 146-year residential life. By 1855 the houses had been connected to running water, and by 1858 were connected to the sewer line. Around 1880, timber verandahs were added to the rear of numbers 62 and 64. Also altered around this time were the roofs, corrugated iron replacing shingles on all four houses in response to fire regulations. In the early twentieth-century, enclosed bathrooms and partly open laundries with coppers were built at the rear of each property. Ann Toy, the museum's second curator, believes 'these amenities could be some of the earliest surviving washing and sanitary arrangements extant for the City of Sydney.' (Toy 1991-1992, 125) It is a sign of the social history approach adopted by Susannah Place Museum's administrators, the HHT, that such below-stairs structures are deemed as significant as the houses in the telling of Susannah Place's story.



Illustration 19: The rear of Susannah Place, showing the timber verandahs

(Photograph © The Mitchell Library,  
State Library of NSW)

Susannah Place's domestic life came to an end in 1990, not because the structure was no longer sound, but as a result of political pressures imposed upon the residents and The Rocks neighbourhood by the SCRA. The period 1970 to 1988 had a profound effect on the physical condition of Susannah Place and upon its and the community's residents. In order to understand the HHT's conservation approach and interpretive focus, this era of Sydney Cove's development needs

explanation. Not only does the period 1970-1988 provide insight into the SCRA's impact upon the local community, it also illustrates wider cultural changes concurrently occurring across Australia. As noted in Chapter 5, the 1970s was a decade marked by a complete reappraisal of Australia's history, culture and heritage resources. The involvement of the state government in urban redevelopment schemes, the widespread vocal opposition to such redevelopment from local communities, and the eventual about-turn of the government authority, the SCRA, succinctly illustrates this reawakening.

### **The Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority vs. The Rocks Resident Action Group**

In the 1960s Sir John Overall, the Chair of the National Capital Development Commission, was commissioned by the NSW state government to consider any potential benefits redevelopment of The Rocks area would have for Sydney. In his 1967 report *Observations on the Redevelopment of the Western Side of Sydney Cove Rocks Area*, Overall called for the creation of a statutory body modelled on the ACT's National Capital Development Commission to manage the redevelopment of 53-acres of The Rocks, realizing it was an area rich in historical associations. Overall's observations were to inform future official histories of The Rocks. In his findings he noted that 'The Rocks site is part of the cradle of the nation. It was there that Australia founded its first hospital, its first fort, military camp, observatory, cemetery, flour mill, bakery, warehouses and its first private enterprise development. In a nation not yet two centuries old there can be relatively few areas holding so much of historical importance.' (Overall 1967, Part II, 1) If the area was to be redeveloped the most important buildings were to be preserved for they were a 'part of the national identity and national heritage.' (Part II, 2) Needless to say, aside from Cadman's Cottage with its convict associations, houses of the largely working-class community like Susannah Place were not identified as amongst the area's most important buildings, structurally or historically:

Below street level in Gloucester Street is a row of very plain cottages with a worn, eroded date plaque proudly stating to one and all that it is Susannah Place, built in 1844. These humble homes are next to a stately row of tiered terraces which, although built in the same century, provide an interesting contrast. But, if attractive, few of the old buildings, especially those on the east slopes, are of sufficient merit in design to warrant preservation at the expense of spoiling a good and full redevelopment. (Clifford 1963, 10)

Responding to Overall's recommendation for a statutory management body, the state government established the SCRA by an Act of Parliament in 1968; it began operations in 1970. The SCRA was given one year from its inception to produce a plan for The Rocks redevelopment. It 'sought the opinion of some 500 organisations and individuals in the city', including the National Trust and government departments both of which 'provided permanent liaison officers during the year-long planning phase.' (SCRA 1981, 10) The Authority did not canvas local residents for contributions to the scheme. This oversight inadvertently started what was to become a major battle between government and commercial interests versus local community concerns.

The following text first published by the SCRA in its *Annual Report* of 1978 under the heading *Chalk and Cheese (or, all that is old does not glitter)* and later in the 1981 publication *The Rocks: A Unique Revitalisation Project for the Birthplace of Sydney*, illustrates how local housing, and by inference The Rocks residents, were perceived by the Authority:

It cannot be denied that there are many buildings still standing in The Rocks which are a sad reflection on any city.

These buildings of a slum standard are neither chalk nor cheese. They have no historical or architectural significance.

Where such buildings are dwellings, the Authority is making every effort to amicably relocate such residents to suitable alternate accommodation.

It has to be accepted in today's society that future generations cannot be expected to continue living in such circumstances. The Sydney Cove



Redevelopment Authority emphatically rejects the tacit belief that people on low incomes should have to live in substandard conditions. (SCRA 1978, 26)

The local community was angered by the SCRA's proposals, the lack of consultation and the patronizing dismissal of their housing and way of life. In late-1970 a number of them formed The Rocks Resident Action Group (RAG), its objective to instigate dialogue with the SCRA so that the community's voice could contribute to the area's proposed redevelopment. The SCRA did not change its plans despite the local opposition, so The Rocks RAG turned to the Builders' Labourer's Federation (BLF) for support in their quest. They asked the BLF to place a 'green ban' on all demolition and construction in The Rocks. The BLF agreed to the RAG's request, calling for the local residents' wishes and the community's history to be respected. 'This was Sydney's third green ban but it was the first in a working class neighbourhood' and the first in which the state government was the opponent. (SP Archives: Moore 1989, 10)

With the BLF on side, The Rocks RAG sought to further its campaign gathering support from a group of professional planners, architects and academics. In a collaborative venture they produced *The People's Plan* that 'advocated alternative developments for The Rocks, chiefly focusing on the preservation and rehabilitation of its historic buildings.' (SP Archives: HHT & SCA 1993)

In the face of such organized pressure, the SCRA finally altered course. In 1974 it established the Resident and Tenants Advisory Committee, whose primary function was 'to provide a ready means of communication between the Authority and its tenants and a forum for local views on proposals under consideration by the Authority.' (SCRA 1975) These proposals centred on The Rocks becoming an area where the nation's progress would be illustrated through a 'juxtaposition of historic buildings and skyscrapers.' (Morgan 1991, 82) The Rocks' cradle-of-the-nation status continued to define the SCRA's direction and despite the open dialogue between Rocks residents and the SCRA, historical association was still subjectively (and commercially) determined.

Given that Susannah Place was assessed as ‘one of a group of buildings at the end of their economic lives and standing on sites required for redevelopment’ (Toy 1991-1992, 128) the significance of working-class housing to a complete understanding of The Rocks area’s evolution was obviously yet to be recognized. Susannah Place was not a grand structure, no great men were associated with it, and thanks to years of minimal maintenance at the hands of the SCRA, it was fast falling into decay. Only the efforts of Mr and Mrs Marshall, who assumed the role of honorary caretakers, saved the terrace from complete dereliction.

Notions of what was historically significant began to change, especially as The Rocks became tidier and, as streetscapes were altered, less obviously the site of Australia’s first village. Into such an atmosphere stepped the HHT. Its then chairman, Mr L.J. Ferguson, had suggested that the HHT should number a working-class house amongst its collection. (SP Archives: Winkworth 1990, 20) So in 1986 the HHT, with the support of the Premier of NSW, set out to save Susannah Place from certain demolition. Recognizing Susannah Place’s cultural and historical significance – one of the few remaining examples of nineteenth-century, working-class housing in The Rocks – the Premier authorized the HHT to begin negotiations to lease the property from the SCRA. The HHT commissioned historian Helen Proudfoot to write a preliminary report to identify the site’s cultural significance in which she also noted Susannah Place’s importance to the Australian house museum field. In 1988, the SCRA dropped the “R” from its tile, ‘signifying a change from their previous approach, to an emphasis on preservation and recycling.’ (Toy 1993, 76) The HHT commissioned architect Robert Moore to prepare a conservation plan for the SCA in 1989, and in 1992 the HHT and SCA entered into a joint agreement for the ‘conservation, interpretation and management of Susannah Place.’ (SP Archives: Griffin 1995, 7)

Unstated by house museum professionals because it is so banal, it must be recognized that permeating the SCRA/SCA and popular understanding of conservation and development in The Rocks is the idea that this corner of Sydney is the cradle of the nation, the oldest quarter of the first white settlement. By adopting the rigorous principles of the early Burra Charter, focusing upon the

fabric of Susannah Place rather than upon memories, meanings and associations, the HHT has been able to tacitly ignore the birthplace narratives promoted by the SCA, thereby creating an interesting paradox.

The HHT as managers of Susannah Place Museum, interpret and conserve the property for the SCA who have consistently told the tale of The Rocks in terms of it being the nation's birthplace, Sydney's original village and the Gateway to Australia. (Shaw 1990; Duncan, K. 1995; web:SHFA 2001) The SCA's understanding of The Rocks community is one of ancestor worship at its most elemental. The 'close-knit community with large, extended families, proud of their working-class traditions and local loyalties' (Shaw 1990, 75) are portrayed as playing a unique role in shaping the nation. And the SCA realizes the history of this community can be traced in the buildings that have survived from the past two centuries.

For the SCA a visit to The Rocks is a visit to Australia's nativity; a visit to buildings like Susannah Place an opportunity for modern Australians to unite with the country's nation builders. This is not the narrative adopted by the HHT. Such an approach is deemed populist and unscholarly. But rather than explicitly challenge the SCA and popular understanding of The Rocks' significance, the HHT hides behind the façade of social history and professional conservation practice. This clash of expectations alerts us to a cognitive dissonance between professional heritage presentation and popular images, evident at many house museums and historic sites.

### **Susannah Place Museum**

From the beginning of the HHT's association with the SCA a professional, contemporary museographical approach to the management of Susannah Place Museum ensued. The HHT commissioned a series of reports to ascertain the site's cultural significance, and to determine the conservation approach, interpretive focus and management structure. In a number of these studies, the authors recognized that preserving Susannah Place as a museum was not only important for The Rocks community, but that its translation to museum status would also

benefit the HHT, broadening its portfolio from Great Man and Architectural type house museums. It was recognized that this would also impact beneficially upon the broader house museum field. The earliest such recognition was made by Proudfoot in her 1986 report; point 10 in her understanding of Susannah Place's significance was that it 'would be capable of changing the emphasis of the Trust's interest and broadening it away from the grand houses to a wider spectrum of Australian society.' (SP Archives: Proudfoot 1986, 15) The importance of such a shift in focus for the house museum profession was later developed in Winkworth's 1990 *Options Paper*, when she credited the HHT with being 'involved in developing some of the most important museum projects in the state.' (SP Archives: Winkworth 1990, 20) By taking on the administration of Susannah Place Museum, the HHT showed that they were committed to providing a more representative image of Australian housing types and lifestyles, Susannah Place's shift to museum following the recent opening of Meroogal, a country town, suburban house museum focusing on women's history.

Of course the HHT's decision to explore issues like women and working-class life in house museums was framed by contemporary cultural and historiographical trends. The HHT itself was committed to reinterpreting its great men at well-established house museums like Vaucluse House and Elizabeth Bay House, introducing subordinate actors into house narratives. The academic interest in social history continued to impact upon scholarly and museum research, with the recognition that social history provided 'new insights into the past and also a new dynamic sense of how the past has forged the present. Everyday people, particularly when they are part of great historical movements, such as Australia's nineteenth century immigration program, can be just as interesting and revealing as famous men.' (SP Archives: Proudfoot 1987, 12) Like the LESTM, Susannah Place's transformation to museum signifies a new era in house museum direction, and reflects contemporary cultural and historical determinants at play.

In line with late twentieth-century museum practice, a principal objective of the HHT commissioned reports was to determine the cultural significance of

Susannah Place. In a report for the HHT by Meredith Walker in 1986, the purpose of identifying a site's cultural significance is nicely articulated:

Cultural significance is a concept that helps in assessing the value of a place beyond its obvious utilitarian value. This value is embodied in the fabric of the place, in the associated documents, in the memory and experiences of people associated with the place, and in its relationship with other places, both historically and in the present. If comparable places are damaged or lost, the value of a place will increase. Similarly, changes in the concerns of the community will affect its perceived significance. (SP Archives: Walker 1986, 33)

Walker's understanding of cultural significance is guided by the Burra Charter (Chapter 5) in recognizing the need to consult a variety of resources – artefacts, written documents, and oral testimony – to gain a complete understanding of a place's multi-dimensional significance.

The Burra Charter approach to ascertaining cultural significance is evident in the statements prepared for the HHT by its consultants. They identify a number of issues contributing to Susannah Place's significance and therefore its rescue and preservation. Moore, in his 1989 conservation report summarizes them thus:

The study of Susannah Place and its residents is a unique local experience but is also representative, if not typical, of a world that is lost in The Rocks. It represents the fierce independence and dignity of a working-class neighbourhood that, finally, after 200 years of social engineering and "development" is being eradicated. (SP Archives: Moore 1989, 36)

All assessors of the property's significance have recognized Susannah Place's working-class roots as an interesting, important and new shift in house museum focus. The individual stories of those who lived at Susannah Place over its 146-year residential history represent broader concerns and issues.

Susannah Place is significant for its evidence of the social heritage of The Rocks and its ability to demonstrate domestic and family life and the role

of The Rocks urban working class in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Within the context of these houses our programs will focus specifically on individuals and their stories. But these case studies do need to be integrated into a broader context, which will be presented in local, national and international terms. (SP Archives: Toy 1990, 16)

Because Susannah Place has such a long, rich history of tenancy, interpretation of diverse issues with resonance across society can be addressed at a personal level: childhood, charity, education, (un)employment, health, poverty, public housing, and class. Many of these issues are uncommon topics for discussion at established house museums. Social History house museums provide a great opportunity to challenge common assumptions about appropriate topics for discussion within a house museum framework.

The final statement of cultural significance prepared by the HHT is:

It is a rare surviving example of an intact simple ... working class terrace which has undergone few alterations and which demonstrates the lives and attitudes of its residents from 1844 to the present through various major changes in the social infrastructure of the area. Susannah Place's importance lies primarily in its survival and continuity of occupation since 1844 as a row of working class houses. The primary significance of the property is as an artefact and its evidence of families' lives, taste and circumstances over the past 144 (sic) years. (SP Archives: Toy 1990, 97)

### **Conservation and Interpretation: Finding a Workable Balance**

Preserving the site as an artefact became the next challenge for the HHT. The conservation approach has directed the museum's narrative content and means of interpretation. Like the Statement of Significance, it is premised on the guidelines set out in the Burra Charter. Essentially, the HHT opted to present the fabric of Susannah Place 'as found', taking as unobtrusive an approach to conservation as

possible.<sup>14</sup> In fact they pioneered a technique which they called conservation cleaning; referred to as the ‘soft option’, the purpose was to remove dirt and dust, then stabilize the environment. This approach was very new and it signified the HHT’s commitment to developing the most sensitive conservation practice. As the Trust’s education officer Lesley Walker wrote in 1993, Susannah Place was ‘developed at a time when to interfere with the fabric as found is tantamount to heresy, when conservation and stabilization are the watchwords, when peeling back the layers is the philosophy.’ (1993 a, 354) In fact, the philosophy supporting the HHT’s approach to leaving Susannah Place as found is defined thus:

This practice focuses attention on the significance of the building’s fabric as a historical record or “archive” which provides evidence of its history of occupation, use and change. (Toy 1991-1992, 130)

This method accepts that the history of a site’s occupation and use can be traced by documenting the layers of change. It has antecedents in SPAB’s ‘anti-scrape’ philosophy and that adopted by the SPNEA. (Chapter 5.)

Because the houses were poorly maintained for over 15 years, Susannah Place was in a very bad condition when the HHT rescued it. Toy argues that the SCRA’s neglect is thus ‘graphically portrayed’ through the fabric, and leaving the properties as found best illustrates this period of Susannah Place’s history. There is however potential for misunderstanding if such an approach is not clearly articulated to visitors, as Lesley Walker recognized when she asked ‘What messages does this “hands off” approach give visitors? That working class housing is squalid, ill-maintained? That such people did not care about missing and patched plaster, peeling wallpapers, cracked and worn linoleum, grubby and stained paint surfaces, naked light bulbs and broken fittings? ... Interpretation becomes critical in these properties.’ (Walker 1993 a, 354)

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<sup>14</sup> Affectionately known in the conservation trade as DAMANBALAP: Do as much as necessary, but as little as possible.

When the HHT adopted the 'as found' presentation and pioneered conservation cleaning, it was responding to the professional demands theorized by the Burra Charter. In the Charter the fabric of a site was stressed as being the primary determinant for significance and conservation approach. Needless to say, most architects, architectural archaeologists and conservators supported this purist approach, but the limitations of focusing upon the fabric were challenged by a number of historians, historical archaeologists, and interpreters. In 1999 a revised Burra Charter was published in which it was noted that significance might lie in more than just the fabric of the place. Significance may also be 'embodied in the place itself, its setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects'. (Australia ICOMOS 1999, 22) It is interesting to note that the debates that circulated in the broader heritage sector culminating in a revised Charter also occurred within the HHT. The implementation of the purist 'as found' approach caused some conflict among HHT staff, as testified by Walker at a conference in 1993.

"The building is the primary artefact" viewpoint wanted to emphasise the architecture, building fabric, conservation practices and 19<sup>th</sup> century interiors. They wanted to teach the public lessons on conservation practices at the property and wished to keep one of the four houses as an archive, available only to special interest tertiary groups on specialized tours. The opposing view saw the social, community and oral history as the strengths of Susannah Place; wished to interpret the properties through ideas, words and lives of the people who had lived there with a particular emphasis on the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Proponents of this view also argued that as much of the four houses as possible should be accessible to the general public. The house that was supposed to be the museum "archive" was also the house that had the richest continuous oral history record - four generations of the same family had lived there from the 1930s until the house was left untenanted in the 1970s. One view expressed by a senior curator was that what is most significant about Susannah Place is that the building fabric has survived from 1844, not that it has one of the richest collections of 20<sup>th</sup> century working class people's memories and the



physical context for those memories. He asserted that the social, oral and community history was not dependent on the context or survival of the buildings themselves and could just as legitimately be interpreted in The Rocks Heritage Centre. I, on the other hand, would argue that people's memories are as integral to the building as is the fabric and vital in any interpretation of the place. In Graeme Davison's words: "Much of our everyday life takes its shape and meaning from the houses, offices, shops, factories and churches in which it is conducted ... Memory invests rooms, walls, passages and furniture with meanings inaccessible to the casual observer." (Davison 1991, 179) (Walker 1993 a, 355- 356)

The HHT has tried to marry the two approaches with a modicum of success. For the 'as found' conservation approach not to overpower the personal narratives and histories, explanation of the Trust's philosophy through explicit interpretation is vital. In the very early stages of the museum's life, this was achieved by conducting guided tours of the properties. But by the year 2001, the reason why guiding visitors and interpreting the conservation approach is necessary has been forgotten and tours are no longer offered. The result is a confusing picture that even the most house museum-literate visitor can find difficult to comprehend.

Complementing the early 1990s era of experimentation, the HHT decided to trial a new approach for visitor access. It was recognized that conservation work would take time, and that in light of the new museographical philosophy, the focus of interpretive narratives would develop slowly. There was also a paucity of artefactual and scholarly historical resources on nineteenth- and twentieth-century working-class life. So before final interpretation policies could be implemented oral testimonies had to be recorded, and contemporary written documents studied. Rather than board up Susannah Place while these activities were proceeding, the HHT decided to implement "Museum in the Making".

The first stage of this program officially began on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1993. Visitors purchased their tickets in the recreated corner shop at No. 64, viewed a video presentation set-up in the first-floor directly above the shop, then had guided access to the rest of this house, including the basement kitchen and the first two

floors of No. 60. Access to No. 58 was restricted to specialist groups, who were only able to view the two rooms on the first floor and the basement kitchen.

In 1994 the second stage of “Museum in the Making” was opened. It allowed a little more access to the properties, particularly No. 58 where the ground floor and basement were now open to all visitors, at the staff’s discretion. The third and final stage started in 1995 and is fairly much the standard in 2001. By 1995 the personalities had been identified and narratives scripted. Educational programs and walking tours of The Rocks were offered. Each of the houses were stabilized and three were open to all visitors.

The route taken by visitors between 1993 and about 1996 was similar to that first offered during Stage 1 of “Museum in the Making”. The house and shop at No. 64 has been recreated to 1915 when the Youngein family were tenants, Clara Youngein running the shop while her husband Hugo worked on the wharves. No. 64 suffered the most damage during the SCRA’s years of neglect, but architectural archaeology was able to discover the layout of the shop. The extensive recollections of Jim Young, Clara’s son who used to help out in the shop, complete the picture. Jim Young’s oral testimony also provided the HHT with a rich resource for the layout of No. 64’s living areas and for insight into community life in The Rocks.

No. 62 Susannah Place, though the house with the longest residential history, is not open to the public. It serves as home to the site’s manager, and its lived-in feel – laundry on the line, a well-tended garden, and smells from the kitchen – serve to maintain the residential feel of Susannah Place. The interpretive spin-off of the site management is very successful.

The front rooms on both floors of No. 60 Susannah Place retained most of their original nineteenth-century detailing. It was therefore decided to present these spaces to an 1844 date, using bankruptcy records to determine the types of furnishings appropriate. Because the interiors’ structural fabric has not been touched-up, it was decided that the fabrics chosen for these rooms be bold and bright. It was hoped this approach would ‘compensate for the sense of decay of

the present walls and project a way of life that is, in feel, more representative of the original inhabitants.’ (SP Archives: Christie 1993, appendix 3) This decision can only be understood by visitors if clearly articulated. The back room on the ground floor at No. 60 has been recreated to the 1930s when Mrs Doretha Sarantides lived there. It is displayed as her kitchen, the presentation based on the oral testimony of Mrs Sarantides’ grandchildren who used to pay weekly visits to No. 60 Susannah Place. The room directly above it is used to display artefacts discovered on archaeological digs in The Rocks neighbourhood. The disjunction of historical periods and display methods in this house require explicit interpretation if they are to be fully understood.

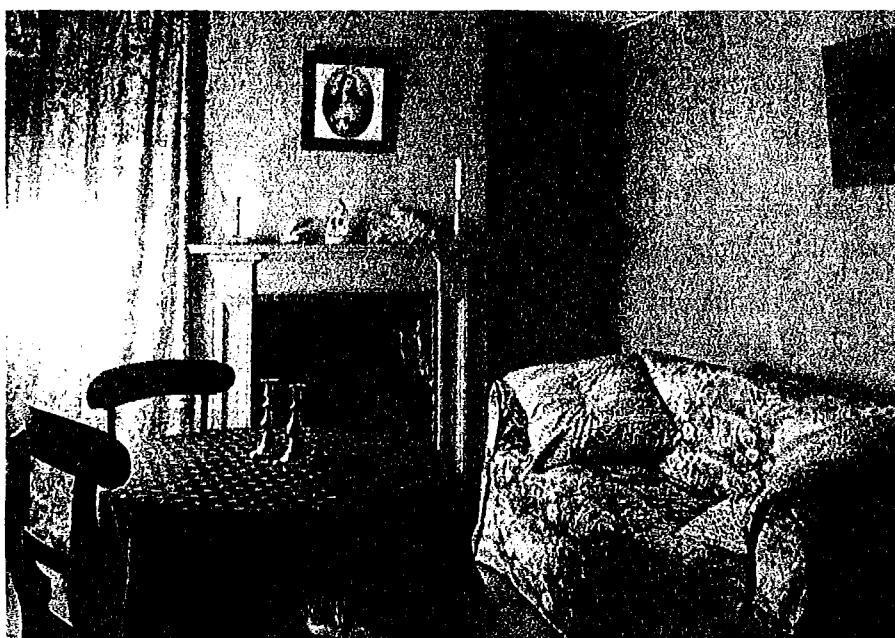


Illustration 20: ‘Susannah Place is a museum that wears the layers of its past with pride.’  
The front room, No. 60 Susannah Place, recreated to the 1840s  
(Photograph © Historic Houses Trust, NSW)

No. 58 was the final house on the tour. It is the most fragile and the one that requires the most interpretation. In fact Ann Toy, curator during the first stage of “Museum in the Making” said ‘to be able to understand or appreciate the aims of No. 58, it should be compulsory for visitors to have inspected the other ... houses.’ (SP Archives: Toy 1990, 3) The domestic life of No. 58 during the twentieth century is well documented. Four generations of one family lived there

between 1918 and 1973 when the house was vacated permanently. But the life of this family is not described through recreated interiors and appropriate tales; rather it is presented through the layers of decorative change still evident in the interiors' fabric. No. 58 Susannah Place 'has survived as a record of four generations of one family, and it is also still possible to detect evidence of the earlier nineteenth-century history of the building.' (SP Archives: Toy 1990, 3) The 'as found' presentation of No. 58 introduces visitors to the HHT's conservation philosophy. It is hoped that exposure to this display will help visitors to 'understand the processes through which the conservation, interpretation and management plan for [Susannah Place] were evolved.' (SP Archives: Toy 1990, 3)

If one visits Susannah Place Museum in 2001 the experience is somewhat different to that envisaged in the heady days of its newness. The visitor purchases a ticket in the shop front at No. 64 and is then taken to No. 58 to watch the video (which has not been updated since 1993). One of the arguments for placing the video on the ground floor of No. 58 is that it allows greater access for people with disabilities. After a brief spiel (the length of which varies depending on how many guides and volunteers there are, how busy the museum is and how many people are in the group) the guide leaves the visitor there to explore the first-floor rooms, the basement kitchen and the outdoor amenities. Hanging on the walls today are information panels explaining the conservation approach. The guide judges how long visitors will need to view No. 58 and 'catches' you on your way out, taking you into No. 60. Again after an explanation of the display rationale, visitors are left to explore the two floors. An information panel explains the motivation for the presentation in the two c.1844 rooms. A panel describing the architectural archaeology and oral histories used to interpret Mrs Sarantides' 1930's kitchen is located in the back room on the ground floor.

When visitors have finished viewing No. 60 they make their way back to No. 64 to explore the Youngein's home. If guides are free they give yet another brief talk. If not, visitors have information panels, complete with excerpts from Jim Young's wonderful memories to guide them through.

### Concluding Thoughts

It has been the aim at Susannah Place Museum from the outset to challenge the stereotype of The Rocks community and its largely working-class residents. The row of terrace houses allowed the HHT to do this in two ways. 'Firstly, in contrast to the images in the popular mind – dirty rat-infested slums and poor, morally degenerate people ... – Susannah Place presents the obverse picture, modest but solid, sewerred and carefully maintained, decorated and improved during most of its occupation phases. Secondly, the buildings are presented within the idea of The Rocks as a "community", a lost land of warm-hearted friendly folk who knew one and another and were always ready to lend a helping hand.' (Karskens 1993, 194)

Celebrating the achievements of Susannah Place's residents, both in their daily lives and as part of The Rocks community has guided the interpretative *raison d'être* over the years. Toy still says: 'Susannah Place's purpose is to celebrate the sense of community.' (Interview with A. Toy, 2001) The recent decay, so vivid thanks to the HHT's conservation approach, highlights the SCRA's neglect and symbolizes a community spirit that refused to be ignored. This era of the property's history is poignantly illustrated in the fabric, but is not explicitly addressed. Interpretation is imperative. Celebration can only be achieved if the conservation philosophy is supported by well-researched, clearly articulated interpretation.

While celebratory in nature, Susannah Place Museum is not premised on the same notion of ancestor worship as expressed at the LESTM in the United States. The many families who lived at Susannah Place over the years are representative of their class, and provide ancestral models for many to admire. But these people are not presented by the HHT as ancestral battlers upon whose shoulders the nation grew. In part this interpretation could be due to the fact that Susannah Place was rescued by the HHT because it was a property at risk. Its loss from the landscape would have deprived Australians of physical evidence of The Rocks working class life, hence its perceived historic and heritage value. Susannah Place's conservation was focused upon the building as an artefact representing a way of life, as opposed to a symbol imbued with cultural and social memories from

which a range of issues could be drawn. Of course this understanding of Susannah Place's significance and the manner in which the HHT has presented it to the public, remains at odds with the popular historical image of The Rocks, its residents and its architectural heritage.

The motivation for the LESTM's establishment was highly political. Susannah Place's rescue was aesthetic and historic. Yet these two examples of the Social History house museum genre demonstrate that challenging social issues can be successfully presented through personal narratives; current conservation practice, if well explained, can contribute to the understanding of these issues; and that house museums no longer need great men to be deemed culturally and socially significant.

## **Chapter 8 Conclusions**

This investigation into the origins, purposes and evolution of house museums has facilitated the presentation of a new typology of the genre as summarized below. My work focuses on just two categories (though the others appear perforce): the Great Man and the Social History. The four biographical studies that punctuate this thesis demonstrate an argument that applies at hundreds of Great Man and Social History house museums in the United States and Australia. The human impulse to worship foundation heroes and other species of great men was harnessed remarkably effectively to the notion of the house museum and despite subsequent historiographical fashions, its persists both in its original form and at Social History house museums to this day. The rich archival material for all the house museums I studied provides deeply textured accounts of museums that are leaders in their sphere. Because of their exemplary status, these house museums have generated external analysis, offering insight into parallel streams of heritage development. The resulting comparative nature of my thesis shows how and why Australia adopted the Great Man model, the ideology that sustained it in the United States but failed to take hold in Australia, and its inexplicit survival in Social History house museums.

### **A New House Museum Typology**

In “Defining and Categorizing the Genre” (Chapter 1) I surveyed house museum typologies to date. Montgomery (1959), Alderson and Low (1976), Seale (1979), and Butcher-Youngmans (1993) all acknowledge the existence of a Great Man type though in other words: Biographical historic house; Moment Shrine; and Documentary site. Because their collective studies are focused upon house museum management rather than with the creation and rationale of house museum genres, these writers have not considered their typologies in a broader museological context.

I posit that today's house museum movement, which has evolved over 150-years to encompass historic and aesthetic examples, began with the birth of the Great Man house museum. Chapter 2 introduces us to the Great Man model and civil religion, the ideology that sustained its evolution. Great Man house museums became shrines for patriotic pilgrimage, where the *numen* of the dead hero could be worshipped. It is a genre that continues to have resonance today and in the United States is still sustained by the principles of civil religion.

A culture conversant with Great Man house museums encouraged the evolution of Biographical house museums: a sub-category of the Great Man genre. Once again the *numen* of a famous person contributes to the house's significance. At Biographical house museums homage is paid to literary, artistic, and political figures; visits to their homes might be considered pilgrimages to some. But Biographical house museums are not underpinned by patriotism or civil religion.

In Chapter 5, I noted that an alternative stream of house museum emerged at the end of the nineteenth century: Architectural house museums. Though a genre that has subsequently adopted the cause of history, Architectural house museums are preserved for their aesthetic, usually architectural, quality.

Collector's houses rely on the principles of Great Man and Architectural house museums for their success. The collector-creators provide a personal association with the house and its collection: the museum's *raison d'être*. The first Collector's house was Sir John Soane's museum in London, which opened in 1837. In the United States, the genre gained popularity in the early twentieth-century as wealthy collectors travelled in Britain and Europe, visiting Stately Homes, palaces, castles and the newly opened Wallace Collection (1900).

Stately Homes, palaces and castles informed the Collector's house model and were to some degree precursors of the house museum genre itself. Partial 'public' access was permitted from the mid eighteenth-century, to those of genteel manner who had the financial means to travel and the education to appreciate what they were seeing. Today such estates are open on a more regular basis and are largely operated as museums, though often the families associated with them remain in



residence. Indeed the familial association contributes greatly to visitor expectation. These grand estates therefore intersect three previous categories: Biographical house museums, Architectural house museums, and Collector's houses.

Completing my typology is the most recently created genre, Social History house museums. Chapter 5 shows that this genre has antecedents in the settler-pioneer model, for it is the historical events and experiences of ordinary people, our shared ancestors, that forms the basis of interpretation. Social History house museums are direct descendents of the Great Man category, and are sustained by the principles of civil religion: they provide venues for ancestor worship and sites for pilgrimage.

Much more could be said of the types I do not study in detail in this work. For the purposes of this thesis, clarifying a house museum typology was important for two reasons. It fills a niche in museological discourse, and it provided a framework in which to consider my research findings.

### **Cultural Context**

The typology above is chronological, starting with the first category of the modern movement, Great Man house museums. In Chapter 2, I examine the cultural context that facilitated the birth of the new museum format in the United States. In the mid nineteenth-century memories of the Revolutionary era were fading, the last remaining heroes dead. It was an era marked by immigration and industrialization. The established social order felt threatened, and thus encouraged the promotion of a unifying national heritage. They adopted the rituals of church religion to give form to a new, secular nationalism: civil religion. Shrines at which to celebrate America's shared memories were provided for all Americans. Amongst these were the earliest Great Man house museums. The rituals of civil religion – pilgrimage, hero worship and contemplation of transcendent collective purpose – meant that class, region, gender, religion or race differences were brushed aside, to be replaced by citizenship; civil religion facilitated the celebration of a common identity.

A principal component of civil religion is hero worship; initially Founding Fathers, later Civil War heroes and United States presidents were the focus of this attention. It is these heroes, principal among them George Washington, who led to the birth of the genre and its continuing success. The homes of these men were to become shrines of the new secular religion. Patriotic citizens were encouraged to make pilgrimages to these new museums. This activity was not difficult to promote for Americans had been picnicking at Mount Vernon and paying homage to Jefferson at Monticello decades before either house was translated to museum status. (Chapters 2 & 4)

The creators of the new genre accentuated the hero's spiritual presence in what became a relic of his mortal life: his home. It is the perceived presence of *numen* that gave the Great Man house museum such power in the new civil religion. These house museums were more than mere museums; they were shrines of the new Republic. Yet it is worth reminding readers that these new house museums were ordinary homes, not monuments or grand structures. The simplicity of early Great Man house museums allowed the genre's creators to emphasize that their great men were in a sense men just like any other, the cult of domesticity sustaining this view. This being the case, pilgrim-tourists who visited these new shrines were encouraged to emulate the living patterns of the departed hero.

In Chapter 2, I analyze the ideology of civil religion in the United States and Australia and its relative importance to the creation of the Great Man genre of house museums. I also describe the influence of domestic religion: its significance to the success of the genre during its embryonic years, and as a precursor of the interpretive style of Colonial Revival. In Chapter 5, I draw attention to the role the preservation movement played in the creation and evolution of Great Man house museums. The Great Man model would not have evolved in the way it did without such preservation efforts. Hosmer's extensive studies (1963, 1965) provide an evocative image of American culture and society from the mid nineteenth-century through to the mid twentieth-century. While substantial and informative in many areas, Hosmer's research pre-dates feminist historiography, thus his understanding of women's role in the success of both preservation and house museum

movements is insubstantial. Hosmer acknowledges that 'women were predominant in the preservation movement as long as it stressed history and patriotic inspiration. When architectural preservation began towards the end of World War I, men became equally active.' (Hosmer 1965, 300) The professionalization of house museography and conservation definitely determined women's ability to participate in preservation. Hosmer says 'women apparently were not so enthusiastic about the field of architecture'. (1965, 300) Could it actually be they were not able to participate because professions were still controlled by men? I do not propose starting a discussion on women and their role in the house museum movement at this stage, though it does warrant further analysis. West's recent publication explores in some depth the significant role women played in preservation and house museum creation, analyzing their achievements within a contemporary gender-politics framework. She also touches upon women's loss of dominance in the twentieth century, like Hosmer attributing this to professional developments in the field championed by professional architects and 'new museum men'. (West 1999, 50)

There is no doubt that the roles women played altered from that of manager-creators to curator-housekeepers, and I am sure that the male-dominated, architectural profession hastened this shift. Thanks to Coleman's germinal study *Historic House Museums* (1933) we have contemporary evidence of a newly professionalized discipline. In Chapter 5, I trace the development of professional house museum and heritage practice, and look at the place of women in house museums as advised by Coleman.

### **What the Case Studies Show Us: Some Evolution, Some Revolution and Some Unusual Discrepancies**

My study began at Vacluse House where a rich collection of archival documents provided a wealth of information and ideas. In its almost 90-year life as a museum, Vacluse House has responded to ever-changing cultural, social and historiographical trends. My serendipitous study of this, Australia's first house

museum, has enabled me to understand Australia's adoption of the Great Man model, and determine the reason for its limited success in this nation.

The Trustees in the early years of Vacluse House's life as a museum attempted to adopt more than just the Great Man model. They also tried to import the genre's sustaining ideology of civil religion. William Charles Wentworth was a significant Australian historical figure, a man involved in the drafting of New South Wales' constitution and an early advocate of federation. These contributions to Australian society coupled with his other notable exploits encouraged the Trustees to promote Wentworth as a true Australian native and patriot. Adopting the language of the Great Man movement in the United States, they referred to Vacluse House as a shrine – a Mecca for hero worship – and encouraged patriotic pilgrimage. They even attempted to add a 'holiday' to the calendar by holding annual birthday celebrations.

In its early years as a house museum, Vacluse House really was comparable to Mount Vernon in interpretation and motivation. But as evidenced in Chapter 3, this focus shifted considerably as the principles of civil religion failed to catch on. Even though ultimately Great Man house museums were not sustained by civil religion in Australia, they continued to rely upon the ideology's characteristics, especially hero worship and *numen*, both elements that continue to contribute to a Great Man house museum's significance. Belief in Wentworth's spiritual attachment to his home, for instance, has continued to determine significance at Vacluse House throughout the twentieth century.

The creator of Australia's second house museum, Cook's Cottage, also in the Great Man mould, drew upon the principles of civil religion modelling his museum on the United States example. An anachronism in the field if ever there was one, Cook's Cottage, with its dubious provenance, was shipped stone by stone from England to Melbourne by the businessman Russell Grimwade. Grimwade promoted Captain James Cook to Founding Father; his purpose in translating the cottage to Australia was to provide physical evidence of Cook's life in a country in which he had never lived, but was credited with discovering. It was imagined that Cook's Cottage was imbued with the *numen* of the great man;

it had to be, otherwise what credibility did Grimwade have in promoting it as a shrine to such an illustrious hero?

Ultimately neither the Trustees of Vaucluse House nor Russell Grimwade were able to continue interpreting these house museums as patriotic shrines to Australian nationalism. In the decades immediately following Federation in 1901, Vaucluse House's Trustees and Grimwade might have sensed a new dawn for Australian nationalism. They were perhaps encouraged in their efforts to promote civil religion by their perception that Australia had broken with its past: no longer merely an adjunct of Britain and its history, but a nation creating its own identity within the Empire.

Federation *was* a defining moment for Australia, but not of the same magnitude as the Revolution had been for the United States. While Americans launched themselves into constructing a radically new future and identity (Gillis 1994, 7) Australians saw themselves as continuing much as previously; by endeavoring to become another Britain and maintaining a place in a worldwide Empire. (Spillman 1997, 65) But this allegiance to the British Empire did not mean Australians had no sense of national identity. As noted in Chapter 2, Australians had developed an identifiable national consciousness, distinct from Britain, by the time of Federation; these 'well-springs' of nationality noted by Jebb on his travels continued to inform identity into the new century.

Two events focused Australia's sense of national consciousness: Federation and World War I. From such occurrences, it could be assumed that heroes and sacred sites would emerge for veneration. But both events took place overseas. Thus the sites that assumed sacred significance were thousands of kilometers away. And the heroes were either anonymous soldiers, or predominantly English politicians. Without heroes and shrines for patriotic pilgrimage, the philosophy of civil religion was void. It was for this reason that Great Man house museums and civil religion failed to ignite interest in Australia.

But this was to change in the 1970s when Australia experienced a cultural awakening. A new political direction challenged the 'cultural cringe' that had

gripped Australia in the middle-decades of the twentieth century. Australia started to look for its own, legitimate history and heroes, bringing on a new wave of self-conscious nationalism. It was an era that acknowledged that multiple identities, layered histories, and varied narratives made Australia the nation it was. Thus when Australians looked into their history books, the nation building characters they saw were by-and-large ordinary people: convicts, immigrants, settlers and diggers. Here were Australia's ancestors and heroes.

Civil religion failed in Australia in the mid twentieth-century because of a lack of identifiable heroes and national monuments at which to pay patriotic pilgrimage. There has been a recent resurgence of interest in Great Man house museums however and indication that some of the principles of civil religion might be relevant in today's Australia. The 1970s era of cultural awakening provoked Australians to reconsider the role individuals and ordinary people played in creating the Australian nation; this is reflected in the range and focus of house museums created in the last three decades.

Of particular interest is the growing trend to translate the homes of Australian prime ministers into museums. Already Joe Lyons' home in Devenport, Tasmania and Ben Chifley's house at Bathurst, NSW are house museums. John Curtin's house in Cottesloe, Western Australia is currently in the process of being translated.<sup>15</sup> Because of their political associations, these men will not be heroes for all Australians, but their roles as influential national leaders have elevated them to a position worthy of veneration.

The most popular individual recently immortalized at Great Man house museums is the sporting hero, Sir Donald Bradman. Bradman is considered an international cricketing legend. He is the subject of countless hagiographic publications, and now the hero of Great Man house museums. The cottage where he was born in

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph Lyons (United Australia Party), was prime minister from 1932-1939; John Curtin (Labor Party), was prime minister from 1941-1945; and Ben Chifley (Labor Party), was prime minister from 1945-1949.

Cootamundra, NSW, is a museum (it was actually the local midwife's hospital at the time); a cottage he lived in as a boy is now in the grounds of the Temora museum, NSW; and two houses in which he lived in Bowral, NSW, are included as stops on a walking tour. One of these houses is owned by the Bradman Museum; its long-term plan is to open this house to visitors, after it has been recreated to the period when Bradman and his family lived there.

The 1970s re-evaluation of Australian history, encouraged by the teachings of social history, made the Australian public realize there was more than one national story. Australia came to be seen as a multicultural nation with many identities, heritages and narratives, from politics to sport. A response to this recognition, echoing the actions of the cultural elite during the nineteenth century in the United States, has been to 'construct a new national civic identity that has priority over ethnic, racial and religious ones.' (Stokes 1997, 17) As in nineteenth-century America, late twentieth-century Australians from a myriad of backgrounds are being 'drawn together under the inclusivist umbrella of "citizenship".' (Stokes 1997, 18) Could it be that civil religion might yet find a place in Australian society and become the sustaining ideology for Great Man and Social History house museums? Will the primitive need to venerate heroes prove powerful enough to encourage a resurgence of the genre? Bradman's homes are definitely shrines which keen cricket fans (pilgrim-tourists) have to make considerable effort to visit, neither Cootamundra, Temora nor Bowral being near large urban centres. It will be interesting to watch how the Great Man genre evolves in the twenty-first century.

The story of Monticello is superficially more straightforward than that of Vaucluse House. It was created in the Great Man mould and sustained by civil religion. Monticello was a shrine, a relic of Thomas Jefferson's artistic genius that truly resonated with his *numen*. The TJMF's mission was patriotic education and this was partly achieved through encouraging patriotic pilgrimage. Monticello relied on the tenets of civil religion for its underlying *raison d'être*.

As a case study Monticello nicely illustrates my findings from Chapter 2, and provides revealing evidence to support the factors I attribute to the house museum

genres' evolution. (Chapter 5) Many new conservation techniques were trialled at Monticello; staff collaborated on projects at other important heritage sites, especially in the early years of Colonial Williamsburg's existence; Monticello was a pioneer of on-site historical archaeology, writing reports on its findings for other house museum and heritage professionals; and most recently, adopting the social history paradigm has seen TJMF staff question long-established narratives.

This last point is especially significant. Social history has had a considerable impact on activities at house museums in Australia and the United States. Since the 1970s in the United States and the 1980s in Australia Great Man house museums have become more professional and democratic. Objectives at Great Man house museums are now intellectually rationalized. Research undertaken by scholars, historians and conservation specialists supports museum activities. This new professional approach has affected house museums in three separate ways.

Firstly, as noted at both Vacluse House and Monticello (Chapters 3 & 4), interpretive narratives have been rewritten, incorporating the tales of the many subordinate actors who lived alongside the great men. Secondly, at Great Man house museums created in the post-social history era, we notice a broader selection of heroes, representing previously disenfranchised sectors of society, notably African-Americans and women. And finally, the social history paradigm has prompted the creation of the new house museum type: Social History house museums.

This more egalitarian focus could lead one to assume that the underlying rationale of house museums has changed. But in fact it has not. There is still a popular desire for heroes, whether they are identifiable great men and women or anonymous ancestors. Professional house museum practitioners repudiate this elemental, atavistic response by focusing on the intellectual arguments that now support their actions. Especially noticeable has been the focus on the house's fabric and emphasis upon scientific research techniques. For the professional practitioner, house museums are relics and therefore precious as evidence of time and history. For popular house museum visitors who are honouring their heroes, it is the *numen* of the former occupant that continues to give the house museum



values. Both approaches are fetishistic. Of course, the professional will argue his fetish is more valid, because it is supported by the rational system of science and scholarship. But who is to gainsay the visiting public?

The Social History house museum, a beautiful manifestation of the scholarly investigation into house museums, is in reality yet another forum for our appetite for heroes. Social History house museums provide another route into worship and its place in house museums. The intellectual approach of historians, archaeologists and conservators gives credibility to the popular desire to venerate our shared ancestry. It makes worship an acceptable practice. Social History house museums are couched in the principles of honesty, democracy and fairness. The houses presented offer a real image of the harsh realities of historic life, but the narratives are largely celebratory. They more often than not symbolize progress, achievement and stoicism.

This is true of interpretation at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. Here the families are celebrated for their perseverance against adversity and for their indisputable contributions to society. The LESTM introduces largely taboo topics into their narratives: working, single mothers; illegal immigrants; welfare and charity; religion and faith. The LESTM has a highly political motive for tackling such issues. It wishes to show that the experiences of immigrants at the beginning of the twenty-first century do not differ greatly from those of their forebears more than a century ago, forebears who are now celebrated as America's urban pioneers. Implicit in this message is that today's immigrants too are pioneers whose contributions to American society will ultimately benefit all.

At Susannah Place Museum in Sydney, the scholarly approach, especially the scientifically justified conservation method, is so dominant that the ancestors barely feature at all. The focus at Susannah Place Museum is the fabric, yet the museum's significance is defined in terms of its working-class residents and their fighting community spirit. When one gets away from the building and reads the interpretive panels, or talks to the well informed guides, the fortitude of these residents' shines through. Susannah Place Museum *is* about celebration.

The LESTM has been able to find a balance between fabric and narratives. The objective, scientific and scholarly approach to study is obviously apparent, but of as much import is oral testimony, which adds a highly personal and moving touch. Susannah Place Museum is yet to achieve this balance. Because the HHT has decided not to offer fully guided tours, the fabric focus-message is not well enough explained and thus overwhelms the narrative content.

The residual presence of past occupants gives Great Man and Social History house museums in both the United States and Australia a starting point upon which to build narratives and determine cultural significance. In both nations visitors respond to this physical evidence; they travel to house museums to connect with the great and the ordinary. Although the models are similar, the museum practices employed alike, and the evolution of house museums comparable, Great Man and Social History house museums in the United States hold a significant place in cultural politics not equaled in Australia. In the United States, these two house museum types continue to be sustained by civil religion. The great men of its earliest house museums were exemplars of the nation, Founding Fathers and nation builders. Over time, historians have recognized that many other people were involved in this nation building process, and thus the anonymous figures upon whose shoulders the nation was built have at last been recognized in the house museum format for their contributions to the nation's development. As a result, house museums, Great Man and Social History, have become critical national monuments: shrines of civil religion. Kulik addresses this neatly in a MAP report conducted for the LESTM, in which he notes that despite the façade of democratic focus:

Most museums are shrines to one thing or another. Most shrink from controversy. Most choose to be cheerleaders. In recent years, museums have expanded their subject matter to include groups formerly left out. But this in many cases has reinforced the prevailing tendencies. Museums are still shrines. They are just more inclusive ones. (LESTM archives: Kulik 1992)

In Australia Vaucluse House, once talked of as a shrine to the great man William Charles Wentworth, is no longer. It has adopted the cause of history, become the exemplar of its genre, and maintains a dignified presence as the longest established house museum in Australia. Wentworth's association with Vaucluse House, as understood by the earliest Trustees, continues to determine significance: 'to commemorate William Charles Wentworth's involvement with drawing up the Australian Constitution, the property will implement a series of programs for the Centenary of Federation that involve debates, temporary displays and brochures as part of the ongoing interpretation of the site'. (Vaucluse House archives: Annual Report 2000, 53)

Cook's Cottage has become something of a farce. Though visited by large numbers of tourists it cannot really be called a shrine. It remains a Great Man house museum, though its provenance has been severely questioned. In fact, Cook's Cottage's greatest value seems to be its ongoing interest to scholars of Australian history, identity, and nationalism, et al. Their interest is not in the site for itself, but for all it symbolizes.

### **A Frequent Discrepancy: Authenticity and House Museums**

An issue that has time and again come to my attention whilst researching for this thesis is authenticity. I consider authenticity to be not an absolute standard, but an aesthetic through which things are perceived. I also believe, and my case studies support this belief, that notions of authenticity have evolved over the decades. But the idea that *an* authenticity exists, one which can be held up as being correct, has been codified by the theorization of conservation and house museum practice. This I think is problematic and needs to be addressed.

As Lowenthal says 'the past thus conjured up is, to be sure, largely an artifact of the present. However faithfully we preserve, however authentically we restore, however deeply we immerse ourselves in bygone times, life back then was based on ways of being and believing incommensurable with our own.' (1985, xvi) This is as true now as it was in 1860 when the MVLA first opened Mount Vernon to the visiting public. Every era is conditioned by its time and place, and further

shaped by contemporary historical approaches, museum practices and research methods. When assessing authenticity with reference to house museums, we have to therefore consider it in terms of contemporary trends, and try not to be judgmental of past understandings.

The earliest notions of authenticity at house museums were expressed at Great Man house museums. In mid nineteenth-century America, the element that established authenticity was the *numen* of the departed hero. Interpretation relied on accentuating the great man's residual spirit. The house's interiors were furnished according to a mid-century understanding of genteel living rather than a (say) 1770s reality. The great man's spirit inhabited the very fabric of his house, thus communion with him was guaranteed. This 'authentic' experience was increased when provenanced items of furniture found their way into the museum's collection. Such objects, rare and highly prized at early Great Man house museums, acquired an almost relic-like status.

The model created by the MVLA at Mount Vernon dominated both Great Man house museums and notions of authenticity for decades. Historical accuracy was not so much ignored, rather it was not considered. More important was celebrating the great man's heroic achievements. Interpretation was influenced by domestic religion, which itself had become a tool in the quest for authenticity at the turn of the twentieth century as it informed the interpretive style of Colonial Revival.

A time-travelling visit to the 1924 Metropolitan Museum of Art's American Wing would prompt visitors to ask, "How on earth could such presentations be considered authentic?" They were so obviously premised on connoisseurship and an ideal of earlier periods, rather than upon historically verified reality. But this would be to miss the point. Colonial Revival, the interpretive style employed by the American Wing's creators and most Great Man house museum professionals, provided interiors that patriotic Americans could emulate. Because of its long association with seminal Great Man house museums, Colonial Revival was unquestionably accepted as authentic. The creators of the American Wing and Great Man house museums did not ignore history, but we have to remember that the historiographical paradigm of the era was biographical history. History, when

employed at Great Man house museums in the early twentieth-century, was focused upon historical events and people. It was used to inform interpretive narratives and to accentuate the achievements of the great man.

But what was meant by authentic was soon to be questioned. The challenge came from preservationists and Architectural house museum creators, whose focus was the fabric of buildings in their care. In late nineteenth-century Britain, John Ruskin and William Morris had addressed the issue of conservation. Their comments and the subsequent formation of SPAB were a reaction against contemporary restoration, which Ruskin perceived to be pervasive and unsympathetic to a building's layers of history. (Chapter 5)

Morris' and Ruskin's approach was further refined by Georg Dehio and Alois Riegl in the early years of the twentieth century. Both men advocated preserving the fabric of a building without replacements. This approach 'puts its hope above all on authentic historic fabric ... as the bearer of the "scars of time" that are reminders of transience, the experience of age-value naturally requires not only mere material but rather at least the trace of the original form, the authentic "appearance".' (Petzet 1995, 91)

Ruskin, Morris, Dehio, Riegl, and Appleton influenced the growing number of professional conservators and architectural archaeologists emerging in institutions like Colonial Williamsburg and the SPNEA: the emerging philosophy was premised on the idea that a focus on the fabric in its unaltered form was the most authentic. This concentration on 'historic fabric' was to influence the 1964 Venice Charter which endorsed the belief that 'if it is to remain credible – an authentic – document, the monument may be conserved, but only in special cases restored, if at all possible it is not to be renovated and it is never to be truly reconstructed.' (Petzet 1995, 92) Australia's custom-written version of the Venice Charter, the Burra Charter, adopted a similar philosophy.

The implementation of conservation practice as defined by these Charters has resulted in a building's fabric dominating claims of authenticity. A most literal adoption of the philosophy is on view at Susannah Place Museum. There the

property's scars-of-time, conserved 'as found', scream of their brutal past. But is this focus on the fabric appropriate, and does it truly allow an authentic presentation? Is authenticity only to be defined in terms of the physical? What about the value of experience, which can only be truly appreciated through narrative and interpretation? Michael Petzet says:

Despite the impressive wealth of investigation and documentation, a modern monument cult that is one-sidedly concentrated on the care of "historic fabric" leads in any case to a dead end if the authentic message of the monument is no longer understood. (Petzet 1995, 93)

I fully commend the sentiments of this statement; a focus on fabric at the expense of meaning, associations and memories does not constitute an authentic house museum presentation.

Another response by house museum practitioners to the theorization of conservation and museum management practice, as supported by scholarship, is the distinction drawn between evidence obtained through 'subjective' scientific research and that gathered via 'objective' historic testimony. Monticello provides an obvious case-in-point.

Monticello has been a leader in the house museum and conservation field: developing and experimenting with new archaeological and conservation techniques; incorporating up-to-date management practice into their operations; undertaking extensive scholarly studies of primary and secondary sources; and most recently conducting oral history interviews with descendents of Monticello's slave population. The staff at Monticello pride themselves on being highly professional. The spirit of Thomas Jefferson continues to resonate loudly, but in its adoption of socially inclusive principles (as you would expect to find at such an exemplary house museum) so now does the *numen* of the plantations many other families, black and white. A challenge to the established narrative has been made, and the TJMF is responding to it. But it is here that the dissonance between subjective and objective approaches is best illustrated.

In Jefferson's era, slaves and poor white workers were written about, but records in their own voices were few. Thus uncovering firsthand accounts to inform histories is rare. It has become customary practice therefore to record the oral memories of these previously disenfranchised peoples. Monticello's "Getting Word" project is drawing on such testimonies to enrich current narratives (allegedly for the house and plantation, but in reality, narratives in the house remain little altered). On many occasions these oral histories support claims of a liaison between Jefferson and his slave Sally Hemings that resulted in the birth of at least one child. Despite these testimonies, descendants' memories are being treated as unreliable rumour. The 'rumour' has persisted and to give the TJMF credit (I say this because the outcome will seriously impact upon the museum's narrative) it decided to test its veracity through scientific means: DNA analysis. A neat illustration that at the end of the day subjective, science based fact assumes more credibility when determining authentic narratives than objective, historical study whether gathered from documents or oral testimony.

As Lowenthal writes, the current trend is to 'treat authenticity as an absolute value, a set of eternal and unshakeable principles.' (1985, 123) But as I have proved through my case studies, authenticity is not an absolute; it is an aesthetic style choice that is defined according to the historical, scientific and cultural trends of the day. Further, authenticity requires more than simply an accurate presentation of a building's fabric. In the case of house museums, imperative to authenticity is an interpretation that makes the whole experience believable. For Great Man and Social History house museums, the spiritual presence of previous occupants is at essence the root to an authentic experience. If the spirit of the occupant is not present, then the museum's rationale is lost, and striving for authenticity becomes a mute objective.

### **Concluding Thoughts: Where to from here?**

As I put the finishing touches to this thesis, I feel that there is still much to say. The house museum genre offers such a rich, complex, layered glimpse into cultures and times past. To date it is a genre that has received little scholarly

research, but times and fashions are changing. In the short period I have been working on this research a comprehensive museological study of house museums, West's *Domesticating History*, has been published, and DemHist, the international committee for house museums has been created. I hope my contribution to the field will encourage further discussion and provoke commentary from house museum practitioners and theorists.

My study focuses on Great Man and Social History house museums: two examples of the genre that have a special relationship. Adopting a museological approach, I believe I have comprehensively illustrated the determinants that led to the creation of the Great Man model in the United States, the factors that encouraged the evolution of the house museum genre, and the rationale behind the creation of the most recent house museum category, Social History.

Finishing with case studies of Social History house museums provides a neat resolution to my starting point, the creation of the modern house museum movement. But it is clear that this is not 'The End'. If nothing else, my thesis has shown that house museums constantly evolve. The genre is continually responding to and reflecting external cultural and historiographical trends.

What direction it will take in the twenty-first century we can only speculate upon. Given that the Burra Charter has recently been rewritten to compensate for the fabric focus it initially advocated, we can hope that narratives will become richer and engage visitors more. We know a workable balance between fabric and narrative is achievable because of the example provided by the LESTM.

It is also time to address the cognitive dissonance between professional presentation and popular images. As seen in the United States, even in these democratic times there is a popular need to worship heroes; house museum administrators explicitly appropriate this urge. Perhaps in the future Australia's house museum practitioners won't be so shy about openly celebrating their heroes, whether they are famous individuals or anonymous groups.



What can be stated with certainty is that the house museum movement will continue to engender support from new museum creators and the public. It could be argued that there is already a surfeit of house museums. Professional organizations like the HHT, SPNEA and National Trusts have already begun to discuss whether translating houses to museum status is the most appropriate action. I imagine such discussions will dominate professional attention in the early twenty-first century.

Finally, though logistically difficult, future studies are warranted in countries further afield than the United States and Australia. A sense of homogeneity within conservation and house museum practice masks the fact that house museums embody specific cultural symbols. Changes occurring within the genre in Britain for example might superficially appear to mirror those in the United States or Australia. But a museological study is sure to highlight cultural, social and historiographical trends unique to that country that would provide a fuller account of the reality of the situation. For example it is noticeable that the social history paradigm is challenging activities at houses owned and operated by the National Trust in England, champions of the establishment. Stately Homes are undergoing serious reassessment, while the scope of properties represented by the Trust is questioned. I can make suppositions about why this shift in focus is occurring but only a thorough study of the circumstances sustaining it will reveal the complexities of the situation.

In its broadest sense, museology is concerned with the theoretical approach to any individual or collective human activity related to the presentation, interpretation and communication of our cultural and natural heritage, and with the social context in which a specific man/object relationship takes place. Although the field of museology is much broader than the study of the museum itself, its main focus remains the functions, activities and the role in society of the museum as a repository of collective memory. ([www.icom.org](http://www.icom.org): ICOFOM)

This definition has guided my research from the outset. House museums deserve further critical assessment, for as my study illustrates, they embody cultural

expectations. They respond to and reflect cultural, social and historiographical change. House museums are repositories of memories and associations; by understanding the relationship of a house museum and its environment we can appreciate much about the people who created it and those who continue to administer it for future generations.

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