MUSEUMS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES:

BRIDGING COMMUNITIES

THROUGH MUSEUM OUTREACH

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

by

Katie Bonanno

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Honors Bachelor of Arts in Art Conservation with Distinction.

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Approved: _____
Vicki Cassman, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved: _____
Ivan Henderson, M.S.Ed.
Committee member from the University Museums

Approved: _____
Leslie Reidel, M.F.A.
Committee member from the Board of Senior Thesis Readers

Approved: _____
Michael Arnold, Ph.D.
Director, University Honors Program

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ABSTRACT

The American Alliance of Museums maintains in its Code of Ethics, "Although diverse in their missions, they [American museums] have in common their nonprofit form of organization and a commitment of service to the public."[1] Yet, current controversy within the museum field in the United States shows that this ethic has not yet been accepted at large. As such, the field currently stands at a critical juncture: are museums inherently valuable as repositories of cultural heritage objects, or must they use their unique resources to serve and engage their surrounding communities to affirm their value to American society? This thesis endeavors to confirm the latter by tracing the evolution of the American museum tradition and investigating the necessity of a paradigm shift within the field to better reflect the commitment to public service set forth by the American Alliance of Museums and to contribute to American museums' relevance, meaning, and sustainability.

Translating theory into practice, a case study was conducted at the University of Delaware to assess how museums can contribute to positive social change as well as community and civic engagement. Specifically, through the University Museums, a public program series was implemented to create a social bridge between the University of Delaware's undergraduate student population and Newark, Delaware's historic African American community, the New London Road community. This effort

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[1] "Code of Ethics for Museums," American Alliance of Museums, accessed March 1, 2014, http://www.aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/code-of-ethics.

built on past collaborations between the University and this local community, most recently a series of video podcasts that present a walking tour of the community, completed in 2011. This museum program series invited visitors to bring and share with others objects and memories related to the themes of the fall 2013 exhibition at the Mechanical Hall Gallery, on-campus museum of contemporary African American art. Stories were video-recorded at both storytelling programs, which were then compiled into a celebratory video, shown at an exhibition reception in November 2013. DVD copies were distributed among participants and posted to the University of Delaware's YouTube page. An evaluation of the program series afforded an opportunity to assess the role of the University Museums in continuing to develop a working partnership with the New London Road community as well as, more broadly, the need for museums to assume social responsibility in their surrounding communities and the implications of active museum inclusion and participation on American civic life.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: FROM MUSEUM OBJECTS TO MUSEUM BRAINS

In his 1920 volume *A Plan for a New Museum: The Kind of Museum it Will Profit a City to Maintain*, librarian John Cotton Dana, now a celebrated museologist, penned, "It is easy for a museum to get objects; it is hard for a museum to get brains."[2] In an investigation of the museum field's history, Dana's pointed statement arguably rings true. In the 3rd century B.C., the Latin "museum," or the Greek "mouseion," was used to denote a temple dedicated to the Muses, such as the prominent Mouseion of Alexandria. Notably, the temple was home to a collection of objects: sculpture, scientific instruments, and plant and animal specimens. But perhaps more notably, the Mouseion of Alexandria's primary role was as a university, a community of distinguished scholars-in-residence including Euclid, Archimedes, Apollonius of Perga, and Eratosthenes.[3]

Today, museums little resemble their ancient forebears. In Renaissance Europe, humanists, intrigued by the Classics and the natural world, assembled cabinets of curiosities and galleries. Cabinets, the Italian "gabinetto" or German "Wunderkammer," were maintained as rooms teeming with taxidermy, rare plants,

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[2] John Cotton Dana, *A Plan for a New Museum: The Kind it Will Profit a City to Maintain* (Woodstock, VT: The Elm Tree Press, 1920), 9.

[3] Edward P. Alexander and Mary Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Function of Museums* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008), 3-4.

decorative arts, and miscellaneous, curious artifacts. On the other hand, galleries, or the Italian "galleria," were kept as grandiose hallways with exhibitions of paintings and sculpture. Both cabinets of curiosities and galleries tended to be private enterprises; collections open to the public would not emerge until the late 1600s at European universities, such as Basel and Oxford, while freestanding museums like the Vatican Museums and the British Museum took form in the late 1700s. These early museums endeavored to provide education in natural history, art, and science.[4]

Were they successful in realizing their educational missions? Museologist Alma Wittlin explained in *Museums in Motion*, "They [the general public] had endured humiliating interrogations to obtain admission to a place described to them as a land of wonders, and they discovered they were aliens in it."[5] In discussing Birmingham bookseller William Hutton's 1784 visit to the British Museum, Kenneth Hudson wrote in his book, *A Social History of Museums,* "The original rules and regulations of the British Museum seem to have been expressly calculated to keep the general public out and to make sure that the few who did eventually make the tour got as little pleasure and profit from it as possible."[6] Of course, education and scholarship were at the crux of the British Museum's, and others', mission in 1784, but certainly

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[4] Alexander and Alexander, *Museums in Motion*, 5-6.

[5] Ibid., 9.

[6] Kenneth Hudson, *A Social History of Museums: What the Visitors Thought* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1975), 9.

not for the general public. Visits by artists and intellectuals were welcomed, while those of the general public were thought "popular but far less useful."[7]

Accordingly, museum exhibitions were organized to the benefit of scholars, artists, and collectors, an elite audience that did not require much interpretation of the collection. Though exhibition styles evolved through the 19th century, incorporating period rooms, for example, this exhibition paradigm did not change substantially until the 20th century. Perhaps initially out of efforts to survive financially, museums have since sought to broaden their audiences and attract the general public.[8]

But even in the face of these changes in the field, many museums today continue to struggle with engaging visitors, becoming meaningful and resonant to greater audiences, and demonstrating their relevance.[9] The modern museum, rooted in historical tradition, has been overwhelmingly labeled elitist, exclusive, reactive, ethnocentric, collection-driven, focused on the past, isolated, insular, static, and privileged. Though the modern museum has good intentions, its value is entirely assumed, rather than earned.[10]

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[7] Ibid., 10.

[8] Alexander and Alexander, *Museums in Motion,* 10.

[9] Neil Kotler and Philip Kotler, "Can Museums Be All Things to All People? Missions, Goals, and Marketing's Role," in *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 167-168; Emlyn Koster, "The Relevant Museum: A Reflection on Sustainability," *Museum News* 85(3): 69.

[10] Gail Anderson, ed., *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 2.

Arguably, in response to these modifiers, the museum field now stands at a critical juncture. In this era of decreasing arts participation[11] and increasingly pressing economic, environmental, and social problems, will museums maintain the above-described elitist tradition? But, can such an elitist institution survive, financially or culturally, in the 21st century? So, will museums reinvent themselves?[12] Will they become community assets, valued for their emphases on equity, inclusion, proactivity, multiculturalism, and social responsibility?[13] Can they?

Perhaps representative of the complexity and controversy of the above-argued critical juncture, these questions beg a few more: is a museum a temple or a forum?[14] Is a museum an object repository or a community center? What should a museum be? What can a museum be – a temple *and* a forum, an object repository *and* a community center?

As the thesis to follow illustrates, museums can take an active role in engaging their local visitors in ways that contribute to positive social change. For this reason, museums arguably should take an active role in serving their surrounding communities. This argument will be presented by [1] first tracing the history of the museum field in the United States and illustrating the development of the privileged

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[11] Sunil Ivengar, et al, *How a Nation Engages with Art: Highlights from the 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*, (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2013), 13.

[12] Anderson, *Reinventing the Museum,* 1.

[13] Ibid.*,* 2.

[14] Duncan F. Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 14(1): 11.

paradigm that has come to typify the field. Next, [2] a literature review will demonstrate evidence of this current and controversial period of transition, supported by instances of American museums, independent and university-affiliated, that both are and are not making changes in their interactions with visitors. Then, in presenting [3] a case study in which public programming at the University of Delaware's University Museums was implemented to build social capital, I will argue that museums that are making changes to actively engage their surrounding communities are both socially responsible and sustainable. Finally, the thesis will [4] connect museums' efforts to the importance of civic engagement in an increasingly digital, disconnected United States, opening the door for further research regarding the role, or roles, of museums in American communities.

As cultural institutions, museums do not exist in a vacuum. They are institutions for celebrating, preserving, and learning from the past, their collections, one another, and the communities in which they are located. It is difficult to make generalizations and assessments regarding what museums should and should not do. Questions of should and should not speak to a greater question of what is a museum ethic, an inquiry that I can only begin to address in this thesis. Instead, this thesis endeavors to show that museums can become dynamic change agents in their communities as well as to encourage discussion, reflection, and transformation within the field regarding the ways museums interact with the communities in which they are located. After all, from the most expansive encyclopedic institution to the most obscure roadside museum, I believe they are absolutely equipped and poised to do so.

To echo John Cotton Dana's sentiment that "it is easy for a museum to get objects; it is hard for a museum to get brains,"[15] this thesis, in short, explores the ways museums are getting brains and using them for good in their surrounding communities.

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[15] Dana, *A Plan for a Useful Museum,* 9.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: MUSEUM PAST, MUSEUM PRESENT, MUSEUM FUTURE

2.1 Museum Past: Emergence of the American Museum Tradition

From Renaissance Europe's cabinets of curiosities evolved public, albeit exclusive, museums at universities in Europe in the late 17th century. Home to natural history specimens, historical objects, and art, these institutions primarily served as static guardians or keepers of their collections.[16] Independent public, still highly exclusive, museums originated in the mid-18th century in Europe: the Vatican Museums in 1750, the British Museum in 1753, and the Louvre in 1793. Contemporaneously, in the fledgling United States, museums took hold as small groups of wealthy people united around a common interest in studying fine objects. Seeking financial support for their studious activities, these original American museum members began to hold open hours for the visiting public to view their exotic, rare, and valuable collections.[17]

Through the 19th century, the web of American museums that exists today began to take form: noteworthy figures like museum director Charles Wilson Peale and financier James Smithsonian established their respective institutions, and in 1870,

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[16] Alexander and Alexander, *Museums in Motion,* 11.

[17] Ibid., 5-7.

the American Museum of Natural History, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Boston's Museum of Fine Arts were founded. Through these dominant institutions, the 19th century solidified American prominence and leadership within the museum field on a global scale. By the turn of the 20th century, museums in the United States were beginning to serve as centers of public education rather than as stand-alone institutions that maintained collections for the sake of collecting. Arguably, this comparatively rapid transition for American museums from elite members-only operations to centers for public enlightenment echoes, in part, the democratic ideals on which the United States was founded.[18]

Accordingly, American museums have historically played a leading role in developing educational programming, setting the stage for museums worldwide to adopt American models and follow suit in planning educational initiatives. For instance, in 1907, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston incorporated a docent into its staff, seeking to provide interpretation of the collection for its visitors. Additionally, early American museums, like the Brooklyn Museum of Art in 1899, often worked in partnership with nearby schools, bringing school groups to learn at the museum and sending museum staff and objects to teach in classrooms.[19] American museums in the 20th century continued to expand their collections and devote time to exhibition planning, but they also began to emphasize the importance of attracting visitors.[20] However, these activities did not, by any means, exist in a balance where both −

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[18] Alexander and Alexander, *Museums in Motion,* 5-7.

[19] Ibid.*,* 7.

[20] Ibid.*,* 10.

collection maintenance and audience engagement – were held in equal esteem; through at least 1945, the process of acquiring and maintaining objects consistently took precedence over teaching and engaging the public through these educational resources.[21]

Moreover, the kinds of educational models developed by the earliest American museums may not be the kind of engagement that is desirable or beneficial. That is, the early American museum and its collection assumed a position of superiority over the American public, an assertion that transcends whether or not museum staff takes an interest in providing educational services like docent tours or school programming to visitors. Rather, in a public lecture given at Teachers College at Columbia University in April 1997, Stephen Weil expounded:

> The museum was established to 'raise' the level of public understanding, to 'elevate' the spirits of its visitors, and to refine and 'uplift' the common taste…Museums were created and maintained by the high for the low, by the couth for the uncouth, by the washed for the unwashed, by those who knew for those who didn't but needed to know and would come to learn.[22]

Is this an air that pervades the American museum in the 21st century?

First, what is meant by the generalization, "the American museum"? From early American museums' collections of exotic and rare natural, historical, and artistic objects, a vast variety of topic- and age-specific museums have since taken form in the

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21 Stephen E. Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 28.

22 Ibid., 195-196.

United States: art museums, natural history museums, science centers, history and historic house museums, botanical gardens, zoos, and children's museums, to echo Mary Alexander's breakdown of the field in the second edition of *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums.*[23] In this immense variety, it is difficult, and to some perhaps incorrect, to make generalizations about the lens through which the field operates. After all, an art museum serves and functions in ways quite foreign to a children's museum.

But, within the museum field as a whole, there are, arguably, overarching assumptions and theories that inform the day-to-day operation of individual art museums, natural history museums, science centers, historic houses, botanical gardens, zoos, and children's museums. Such a generalization – the "American museum" – is then vital for the purpose of the thesis that follows, as these day-to-day operations, informed so strongly by trends and predominant beliefs within the field, affect the museum's equity, effectiveness, and sustainability, not to mention the museums' visitors and surrounding community. The discussion above briefly outlines the sweeping assumptions under which museums operated in the United States through the 19th and 20th centuries; what are these overarching assumptions and predominant beliefs within the field today?   And, to restate the above-posed inquiry, is the traditional paradigm of the 19th and 20th centuries maintained in American museums today?

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[23] Alexander and Alexander, *Museums in Motion, vii-viii.*

2.2 Museum Present: Shifting the Paradigm

2.2.1 The Need for Change

Emlyn Koster, former president and CEO of the Liberty Science Center in Jersey City, New Jersey, asks, "As news stories unfold and society seeks to understand the nature and significance of events, is the museum field going to adapt to a greater role in exploring the things that profoundly matter in the world?"[24] Historian Cary Carson asks, "Are historic sites and house museums destined to go the way of Oldsmobiles and floppy disks?" What's Plan B?[25] And, Nina Simon, executive director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History in Santa Cruz, California, asks, "How can cultural institutions reconnect with the public and demonstrate their value and relevance in contemporary life?"[26]

Each of these museum scholars and practitioners continues on, in their respective article or book, to discuss the different ways they believe the field can be revitalized: for Koster, through bold visions that work to achieve museum relevance;[27] for Carson, through collaboration with non-museum entities to present history to the coming-of-age digital generation in a way that is meaningful;[28] and for Simon,

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[24] Koster, "The Relevant Museum," 67.

[25] Cary Carson, "The End of History Museums: What's Plan B?" *The Public Historian* 30(4): 9.

[26] Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, 2010), accessed March 1, 2014, http://www.participatorymuseum.org/preface/.

[27] Koster, "The Relevant Museum," 69.

[28] Carson, "The End of History Museums," 24-25.

through designing participatory experiences in museums that communicate content, engage visitors, and create social connections.[29] Although Koster, Carson, and Simon address the problem with different proposed solutions, what is common to each of their visions is the recognition that the museum field necessitates change and revitalization. The above-outlined historical assumptions and theories are in need of redress, but why?

Quite simply, the traditional museum model, which maintains the museum as created by the high for the low,[30] does not suit the United States in the 21st century. This paradigm, under which many institutions continue to function today, fails to engage and enrich the lives of an increasingly diverse audience that spends much of its time captivated by electronic screens. The National Endowment for the Arts' *How a Nation Engages with Art: Highlights from the 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* reports that 71% of American adults, or 167 million people, who participated in the arts at least once during a twelve-month period did so via "arts consumption through electronic media."[31] This compares to 21% of adults in the United States who physically visited an art museum or gallery in 2012, the lowest number since 1982, when the National Endowment for the Arts began tracking art museum and gallery attendance.[32] This data suggests that digital experiences with the arts are

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[29] Simon, *The Participatory Museum.*

[30] Weil, *Making Museums Matter*, 28.

[31] Sunil Ivengar, et al, *How a Nation Engages with Art,* 8.

[32] Ibid.*,* 11-12.

replacing in-person, face-to-face arts experiences, such as museum visitation and participation.

In *Museums and the Paradox of Change*, museum director and scholar Robert R. Janes argues that the fact that museums are failing to captivate an increasingly digital world is not just an issue of Americans' increased preference for engagement with the arts, history, and culture via the web, but an issue of much deeper significance: what is the role and responsibility of the museum today?[33] In Janes' precursor to the third edition of *Museums and the Paradox of Change,* entitled *Museums in a Troubled World: Renewal, Irrelevance, or Collapse*, he paints a grim picture of a world struggling to address a troubling range of environmental and social ills so numerous that he writes, "Of necessity, I will not attempt to catalogue the world's woes but will focus instead on the need for heightened stewardship in several selected areas."[34]

The profundity of this statement is multiple-fold: for one, an exhaustive cataloging of public problems worldwide is unnecessary; the existence of countless complex social, economic, and environmental issues is widely accepted and need not be documented. Secondly, this statement launches Janes into a discussion of stewardship, reflecting the urgent need for governing bodies, communities, and everyone in between to take ownership of solving public problems as well as the original principle on which museums were founded – that is, to be stewards of fine art

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[33] Robert R. Janes, *Museums and the Paradox of Change* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), *xxi.*

[34] Robert R. Janes, *Museums in a Troubled World* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 26.

objects and artifacts. Janes' assertion suggests a connection between museums and the greater good, a connection that is difficult to realize in a world where arts participation is shifting to the digital realm,[35] where wicked problems dominate the public discourse,[36] and where museums are struggling to find their role in this mess.[37]

This evidence speaks to the need for a paradigm shift within the field. In the preface to Stephen Weil's *Making Museums Matter*, Marc Pachter, self-proclaimed museum official, summarizes:

> The notion that the museum world, and in particular the world of art museums, is a sacred, special place that is ipso facto wonderful and deserving of the world's support and adoration is not only outdated but pernicious. What people who work within it need to do, those who are still stuck in the exhausted paradigm, is to realize that the modern world is asking tough questions of museums and of their management, and that they are appropriate questions.[38]

2.2.2   Roots of Change

Although this call to action and re-evaluation of the "exhausted paradigm" is one that is especially urgent today given the issues outlined above, this is a belief that

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[35] Sunil Ivengar, et al, *How a Nation Engages with Art,* 8.

[36] Janes, *Museums in a Troubled World*, 26.

[37] Koster, "The Relevant Museum," 67; Carson, "The End of History Museums," 9; Simon, *The Participatory Museum*; Janes, *Museums in a Troubled World,* 26.

[38] Marc Pachter, foreword to *Making Museums Matter,* by Stephen Weil (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), *x.*

has surfaced frequently through the 20th century, arguably beginning with librarian John Cotton Dana. In April 1917, he formally introduced *The New Museum Series*, a series of booklets that provided a summation of Dana's "experiment" with the Newark Museum in Newark, New Jersey. By "experiment," Dana was referring to his efforts to implement his visionary ideas on museum construction, collections, and management.[39] Namely, Dana recognized the need to make museums useful, to transform them into institutions whose meaning transcended the objects they housed: in his 1920 *A Plan for a New Museum*, Dana wrote, "But, objects do not make a 'museum;' they merely form a 'collection.'"[40] Challenging the historic tradition that emphasized the importance of maintaining and expanding the museum's collection, Dana argued that the museum must do more than engage in collecting activities. Notably, too, Dana approached the need for this transformation from the overarching umbrella of museum operation: the "new museum is not a museum of a certain kind."[41]

Ultimately, the museum Dana envisioned in the 1920s was a museum that was accessible and at the center of civic life. These ideas seem self-evident today, when museums endlessly pepper the American cultural landscape, but museums prior to and during Dana's time were set-off, isolated, and removed from the everyday lives of a

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[39] John Cotton Dana, *The New Museum* (Woodstock, VT: The Elm Tree Press, 1917), 5.

[40] Ibid., 9.

[41] Ibid.*,* 12.

city's residents.[42] Through the museum's centrality, Dana believed the new museum could become useful.[43] For example, Dana envisioned the new museum working closely with its surrounding community, taking advantage of vacant stores, public spaces, and even residents' private homes. In these spaces, Dana saw great potential for loaning and displaying paintings from the museum's collection for a short span of time, perhaps a week or a month.[44] Inside the museum, too, Dana argued, the staff must continue to work closely with the local community: "a museum of art, supported by a community, should encourage the movements toward the beautification of its products which that community discloses."[45] The relationship between the museum and the community should be reciprocal and, above all, instrumental to the museum's function. But at the time, Dana recognized his ideas would not be widely adopted or celebrated: "A museum of art is not thought of as the chief patron and encourager of the arts of its community: but as primarily a store-house of expensive curios."[46]

Dana was correct; though his ideas stimulated some discussion (and controversy) in the field regarding the ways museums should serve a broader public,[47] the field continued, for the most part, to serve an exclusive, elite sliver of the

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[42] Ibid., 14.

[43] Ibid., 16.

[44] Ibid., 18-19.

[45] Ibid., 25.

[46] Ibid., 27.

[47] Anderson, *Reinventing the Museum,* 10.

American population. Theodore Low, an educator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, expressed this in his pivotal 1942 article "What is a Museum?"[48] In a world consumed by World War II, Low wrote, "Had the museums of yesterday realized the role which they should have had in community life, they would be infinitely better prepared to meet the emergency at hand today. Be that as it may, it is clearly apparent that the present job of museums goes far beyond the normal wartime duties."[49]

If museums were placed on a spectrum from "'a dynamic force in the cultural life of the community'" to "'a collection of buttons,'" Low argued that most museums in 1942 would find themselves closer to the "buttons collection" end.[50] Or, the museum's emphasis at this time remained on the maintenance and expansion of the collection, rather than on ways it could engage and serve the public. Museum education, Low argued, began as a tool for increasing attendance, with curators, directors, and trustees more interested in building up collections and increasing the institution's prestige than in making it educationally useful, echoing John Cotton Dana.[51] Low painted an image of a museum that was in a tense battle between the conservatism of its scholars and management and the progressivism of its educators.

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[48] Theodore Low, "What is a Museum?" in *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift,* ed. Gail Anderson (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 30.

[49] Ibid., 31.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., 33.

This led Low into a passionate discussion of what museums can become: "What, then, is this common goal for which all three functions [acquisition and preservation, scholarly study, and popular education] should be striving and in the fulfillment of which they should abet rather than oppose the other?" The answer to this question, Low endeavored, was education in all its forms, from scholarly investigation to public education. Low qualified, though, that all educational initiatives must be undertaken with the museum's connection to public life in mind, or, that the role of collecting must be diminished in the museum of the future. "It is here, in the field of popular education, that the museum belongs today…Museums are public institutions. That cannot be forgotten again. No doubt the scholars will verbally object to this altered conception of the museum's purpose and they are doing it already."[52]

Like John Cotton Dana, Theodore Low's prediction about the field's reaction to his argument was correct. Controversy and conflict remained prevalent within the museum field, perhaps giving way to Canadian museologist Duncan Cameron's "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," published in 1971. He began the article with a humorous but genuine call for psychotherapy in museums: "There is abundant evidence of an identity crisis in some of the major institutions, while others are in an advanced state of schizophrenia."[53] He was referring, of course, to the same issues that Dana and Low addressed in their respective authorship in 1920 and 1942: what role should the American museum take in its surrounding community? "Is a museum

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[52] Ibid., 39.

[53] Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," 11.

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something that can be housed, with any degree of compatibility, side by side with ballet classes for three-year-olds, amateur arts programs of every variety, and the occasional bingo game benefit for a local charity?"[54] This is the question to which Cameron endeavored to provide an answer.

Unlike predecessors Dana and Low, Cameron took a less concrete stance on the issue of museum reform and the necessity of a paradigm shift. He recounted the establishment of the public museums of about a century prior to the publication of his article: public museums were first founded as temples that enshrined objects thought to be significant and valuable.[55] Cameron maintained that this "museum as a temple" indeed had value to society as a reaffirmation of human achievement and development.[56] But, he argued, museums should engage in reform that will "make them better and more effective museums in the sense of the museum as a temple."[57] So, unlike Dana and Low, who called for comparatively comprehensive reform and change within the museum field, Cameron notably acknowledged the value of the historical museum model.

But, Cameron asserted, this value was not enough to justify the existence of museums for their sake alone. He introduced the notion of social responsibility in museums, arguing that museums that exhibit "alien, exotic, or historic cultures…are

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[54] Ibid., 13.

[55] Ibid., 17.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

part of social responsibility in cultural programming."[58] This kind of reform, according to Cameron, was long overdue, not only necessary for the democratization of culture, or the creation of equal cultural opportunity, but also for the survival of the museum field.[59] What does this reform look like? Cameron explained:

> In practical and specific terms, I am proposing not only exhibition halls and meeting places that are open to all, but also programs and funds for them that accept without reservation the most radical innovations in art forms, the most controversial interpretations of history, of our own society, of the nature of man, or, for that matter, of the nature of our world.[60]

For Cameron, then, the usefulness of the museum, to use Dana's terminology, would come not with simply opening the museum up to a greater and more diverse audience, but with the kind of exhibitions the museum presented and the position of authority the museum assumed in presenting these exhibitions. Rather than answering questions, it seems the forum-museum Cameron envisioned should ask them.

Perhaps even more importantly, Cameron asserted in this text, "Where museums, be they of art, history, or science, have the knowledge and the resources to interpret matters of public importance, no matter how controversial, they are obliged to do so."[61] This idea of museums' obligatory social responsibility was a vein picked

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[58] Ibid., 18.

[59] Ibid., 18-19.

[60] Ibid., 20.

[61] Ibid., 22.

up by Elaine Heumann Gurian, museum consultant and advocate for inclusion in museum settings. As the keynote speaker at an October 1988 conference, "Museums as Socially Responsible Institutions," at The George Washington University in Washington, DC, Gurian, like her scholarly predecessors, acknowledged and refuted the field's historical tradition, where museums were believed to have "an objective point of view, presenting to the world perceived knowledge (as it truly was) to the visitors for their edification."[62] She also exposed the potential for museums to be socially irresponsible forces for evil, such as the museums Adolf Hitler organized and planned for Nazi Germany. But, she questioned, can museums be forces for good?[63] Dana would call this "force-for-good" museum a useful one, Low would call it a museum with education at its center, and Cameron would call it a successful temple-forum hybrid institution. Gurian argued that museums should be socially responsible, or more inclusive and willing to take on work that contributes to a better, fairer world.[64] In 1988, she expressed that this idea of social responsibility in museums was a "hot topic," and reflecting back on her work in 2006 in her book, *Civilizing the Museum*, she wrote that the field seemed to have lost its urgency for this transformation, hence this thesis.

Furthering dialogue on museums' roles in society near the turn of the 21st century, Stephen Weil broadened this conversation, this call for a paradigm shift in his

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[62] Elaine Heumann Gurian, *Civilizing the Museum: The Collected Writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 69.

[63] Ibid., 70.

[64] Ibid., 73-74.

1998 essay on the ongoing transformation of the American museum, "From Being *about* Something to Being *for* Somebody."[65] He highlighted the now-widely accepted reshaping of the American museum, a transformation from being inwardly focused to being outwardly so. This shift would make the collection not the purpose of the museum but rather one of its resources. And these resources, Weil explained, could be used to the great benefit of museums' surrounding communities: "an emerging new museum model – a transformed and redirected institution that can, through its public service orientation, use its very special competencies in dealing with objects to improve the quality of individual lives and to enhance the well-being of human communities."[66]

However, Weil argued that the change should not stop here. Rather than the museum being the cause of public service, it could become an instrument of public service.[67] This thinking opens the proverbial door to collaboration with the museum's local community, for the community to essentially decide the ways the museum is used to better its locale. This is a practice that has since been adopted by several trailblazing museums, to be discussed in the section to follow.

This is a practice and theory, too, that has been adopted by museum consultant and leader Nina Simon, arguably one of the field's greatest innovators from the early 2000s through the present day. In addition to keeping a blog, "Museum 2.0," which she regularly updates with thoughts and opinions on the progress and practice of this

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[65] Weil, *Making Museums Matter*, 28.

[66] Ibid., 29.

[67] Ibid., 49.

paradigm shift within the field, she authored *The Participatory Museum* in 2010. In this book, Simon presented a how-to guide for inviting inclusive participation and creating value in cultural institutions. She argued that in a traditional museum exhibition or program, visitors consume content provided by the museum;[68] this was Simon's interpretation of the traditional museum model. Her interpretation of the museum that embraces the paradigm shift, on the other hand, was one that instead provides a platform for museum visitors to connect with one another through different participatory modes – creating, distributing, consuming, critiquing, and collaborating around content.[69] Through participation, the museum could become valuable to its surrounding community, and the surrounding community could become valuable to the museum.

From Dana, Low, and Cameron to Gurian, Weil, and Simon, it is evident that in the past century of museum practice in the United States, the issue of what a museum's role can and should be in and for its surrounding community has been debated, questioned, and theorized. The scholarship outlined above presents the evolution of thought through the 20th and early 21st centuries on the potential for museums to embrace a dynamic role in their communities through active inclusion, participatory design, and the surrender of some historical authority. This view that a paradigm shift is vital for the equity, effectiveness, and sustainability of the museum field is shared by supplementary scholarship, voiced by like-minded museologists and

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[68] Simon, *The Participatory Museum,* "Chapter 1: Principles of Participation."

[69] Ibid.

practitioners.[70] Yet, as the section to follow will show, there are institutions

throughout the United States that cling still to the tired paradigm where the museum

assumes the position of greatest cultural authority in society. Why does the field still

grapple with its superiority complex? And, is there value to this tradition?

2.2.3   Controversy around Change

To defer to Nina Simon, who also authored the foreword to Robert R. Janes'

Museums and the Paradox of Change, an array of factors explains the field's

resistance to change. Museums, she wrote, are non-profit institutions that do not feel

the same pressure as for-profit institutions that must constantly compete, innovate, and

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[70] Robert Archibald, *The New Town Square: Museums and Communities in Transition* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004); Graham Black, "Embedding Civil Engagement in Museums," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 25(2): 129-146; Kevin Coffee, "Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and the Formative Roles of Museums," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23(3): 261-279; Steven Conn, *Do Museums Still Need Objects?* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); John H. Falk, Lynn D. Dierking, and Susan Foutz, *In Principle, In Practice: Museums as Learning Institutions* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007); John H. Falk, Lynn D. Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000); John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000); Selma Holo and Mari-Tere Alvarez, *Beyond the Turnstile* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2009); Kim Igoe and Alexandra Marmion-Roosa, "Listening to the Voices in Our Communities," *The Journal of Museum Education* 27(2/3): 16-21; Emlyn H. Koster and John H. Falk, "Maximizing the External Value of Museums," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 50(2): 191-196; Amy K. Levin, ed., *Defining Memory* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007); Kathleen de la Peña McCook and Maria A. Jones, "Cultural Heritage Institutions and Community Building," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 41(4): 326-329; Aaron Seagraves, "Crafting Identity, Creating Community, and Building Museum Exhibits," (Master's thesis, University of Oregon, 2009); Lois H. Silverman, *The Social Work of Museums* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010); Lois H. Silverman and Mark O'Neill, "Change and Complexity in the 21st-Century Museum," *Museum News* 83(6): 36-43.

meet the needs of an ever-changing free market. Unlike other non-profit institutions, though, museums do not provide the essential, life-sustaining services that soup kitchens, food pantries, homeless shelters, and governments do. Therefore, "there is no moral outrage to be had at [a museum's] laziness or ineptitude."[71] Finally, Simon wrote, in most places, citizens have limited experience with museums and thus have limited means for comparing the actions and services of one museum to another. In summary, museums are "non-profit, non-essential, non-competing" institutions.[72] Additionally, the very foundation of the museum field is the belief that the material culture our society has often forgotten is worth museums' time and preservation efforts. For these reasons, Simon stated, "Change in museums requires a serious reframing of goals and values while maintaining the value and power of artifacts."[73]

This is a weighty tension to reconcile, and it raises the question of how museums engage in change, let alone a sweeping paradigm shift, at all. The process can begin quite simply, actually, according to Simon: "Institutional change in museums doesn't start with a slow musing dissatisfaction. It typically starts with a shock, usually external, often involving money."[74] The nature of this impetus is dually problematic and, in a twisted way, beautiful. The problem is that in order to enact institutional reform within the museum field, financial distress, in many cases,

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[71] Nina Simon, foreword to *Museums and the Paradox of Change, Third Edition*, by Robert R. Janes (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), *xv.*

[72] Ibid., *xvi.*

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

must preclude it, and waiting for financial problems is an uncertain, misdirected practice. On the other hand, the twisted beauty of this reality is that in this age where museum visitation is steadily declining and stakeholders are questioning the authority and value of museums, financial struggles are likely imminent for almost all institutions. Change, however controversial, is forthcoming in the museum field.

John Cotton Dana was arguably the first museum professional to speak and write so widely and extensively on the need for change within the field. His ideas were met with controversy when first introduced, and they remain controversial today, especially, as Simon wrote, museums tend to resist change. Controversy is particularly heated today, though, as the social issues that plague this world rage on ever-more wickedly. Can a museum justify its existence as an elitist object repository if, say, a block from the museum, the homeless beg for help, poverty rages on, and pollution continues to poison both the earth and our bodies, to name a few?

The call for a paradigm shift within the field has been controversial for many years, and today, controversy remains. Notably, museums that are and are not changing, that are and are not adapting to the new paradigm for museum practice, are both at the receiving end of public criticism. In August 2013, for instance, a pair of articles, both of which reflect this debate, was published on the web, specifically through the online edition of *The New York Times* on August 10th and the website of the Cable News Network (CNN) on August 22nd.

Journalist Judith H. Dobrzynski of *The New York Times* offered a harsh critique of participation in museum settings in her opinion piece entitled "High Culture Goes Hands-On." In the article, she wrote distastefully of the recent trend in museums to adopt the participatory practices of our culture's alleged "quest for an

experience."[75] She wrote, "Some of these initiatives are necessary, even good. But in the process of adapting, our cultural treasures are multitasking too much, becoming more alike, and shedding the very characteristics that made them so special – especially art museums."[76] In example after example of museums that were either exhibiting participatory artwork or taking on participatory programming, or both, Dobrzynski expressed pointed disappointment in that these museums were losing the "aura" that once defined them. She concluded her article with a series of leading questions, "Now is the balance shifting too far to the experience? Are they [museums] losing what makes them unique? Should museums really follow the path of those 'experience' businesses?"[77] After all, Dobrzynski argued, if a museum invites active participation, the gap between museums and businesses like Chuck E. Cheese's and Build-A-Bear Workshops is lessened significantly, to the detriment of the museum field.[78]

On the other side of the debate, James Durston, writer for CNN, powerfully penned an attack of the traditional elitist museum model in his article entitled "Why I Hate Museums." Echoing Dobrzynski's style, Durston began his article with a series of questions: "With global tourism expanding at exponential rates and in innovative

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[75] Judith H. Dobrzynski, "High Culture Goes Hands-On," The New York Times, last modified August 10, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/11/opinion/sunday/high-culture-goes-hands-on.html?emc=eta1&_r=1&.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

ways, what role can traditional institutions such as museums expect to play in contemporary travel itineraries? Can they still rely on the intrinsic value of their collections? Or do they need to start telling their stories with more force?"[79] Durston explained his hatred of visiting museums, a hatred that has led him to diligently avoid museums at all costs. Why? Museums, as Durston vehemently expressed in this article, are boring, irrelevant, and surrounded by "a climate of snobbery."[80] However, Durston did recognize the value in museums' preservation of our cultural heritage: "A lot of work is done outside the musty confines of their collections, from discovering new mammals in the jungles of Ecuador to creating and growing a huge global seed bank…But inside these crypts of curatorship, the connection to humankind falls short."[81] Or, museums, to Durston, fall short in communicating their value to visitors in meaningful ways.

Drawing from this illustrative snapshot of the criticism to which American museums are subject, what are museums to do? To change, or not to change? To adapt, or to maintain?

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[79] James Durston, "Opinion: Why I Hate Museums," CNN, last modified August 22, 2013, http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/22/travel/opinion-why-i-hate-museums/?hpt=us_mid.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

2.3 Museum Future: Traditional and Trailblazing Models

Although the American Alliance of Museums' Code of Ethics explicitly emphasizes public service,[82] this commitment to a diverse public manifests itself in different ways and in varying degrees of priority in museums throughout the United States. Additionally, as drawn from evidence of dispute, it remains difficult for museum professionals, scholars, and the general public to determine what the role of museums in our society is and should be. A cursory survey of the missions and actions of museums on both sides of the paradigm shift, to follow, illustrates this difficulty and provides support for the institutional model American museums should strive to emulate in accordance with the American Alliance of Museums' Code of Ethics as well as with the field's goal of relevance, meaning, and sustainability.

2.3.1 Museum as Temple

John Cotton Dana, in his 1917 essay, "The Gloom of the Museum" wrote that American museums had developed, by the early 20$^{\text{th}}$ century, into "remote palaces and temples – filled with objects not closely associated with the life of the people who are asked to get pleasure and profit from them, and so arranged and administered as to make them seem still more remote…"[83] This belief was maintained by journalist James Durston, who asked of the museum field, "Where's the relevance? Why, in places designed to celebrate life and all its variety, is there such a lack of vitality?"[84]

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[82] "Code of Ethics for Museums."

[83] John Cotton Dana, "The Gloom of the Museum," in *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 20.

[84] Durston, "Opinion: Why I Hate Museums."

With their prime real estate, famous collections, and support from an ample number of
tourists, some museums continue to operate within the traditional paradigm.

2.3.1.1   Maintaining Tradition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

A hallmark of the traditional museum model is the collection, preservation, and
exhibition of art and historical artifacts, by scholars for the public. The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, located on Fifth Avenue in New York City, was founded in 1870
upon these very principles: "to be located in the City of New York, for the purpose of
establishing and maintaining in said city a Museum and library of art, of encouraging
and developing the study of fine arts, and the application of arts to manufacture and
practical life, of advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and, to that end,
of furnishing popular instruction."[85]   The Met's focus in 1870 was to establish a
world-renowned collection of fine art, provide opportunities for scholars to utilize this
collection, and, last of all, educate the masses.

Updating its mission in September 2000, over a century later, the Met now
proclaims that it exists to "collect, preserve, study, exhibit, and stimulate appreciation
for and advance knowledge of works of art that collectively represent the broadest
spectrum of human achievement at the highest level of quality, all in the service of the
public and in accordance with the highest professional standards."[86] Again, of
greatest emphasis, and presumably importance, within this mission are the scholarly

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[85] "Museum Mission Statement," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified
September 12, 2000, http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/mission-
statement.

[86] Ibid.

activities of collection and preservation. The idea of public service appears to be tangentially tacked onto the end of the mission statement.

How is the Met working through its scholarly activities to serve its public? This remains uncertain. Although the Met is home to one of the most awe-worthy art collections in the world, does the Museum engage in outreach to meet the needs of its neighbors in Manhattan's Upper East Side? Although the Museum certainly hosts a variety of public programs, workshops, and performances and is open seven-days-a-week, perhaps this inquiry is best answered by the fact that in 2012, the Museum was sued by two of its members over its misleading policy on admissions fees,[87] contributing to an air of entitlement and elitism at the museum.

2.3.1.2 Maintaining Tradition at the Yale University Art Gallery

Like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Yale University Art Gallery contains one of the world's premier encyclopedic collections of fine art. The Gallery's mission is:

> to encourage appreciation and understanding of art and its role in society through direct engagement with original works of art. The Gallery stimulates active learning about art and the creative process through research, teaching, and dialogue among communities of Yale students, faculty, artists, scholars, alumni, and the wider public. The Gallery organizes exhibitions and

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[87] Randy Kennedy, "Met Museum Is Being Sued Over Admission Fees," The New York Times' ArtsBeat Blog, last modified November 15, 2012, http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/15/met-museum-being-sued-over-admission-fees/.

educational programs to offer enjoyment and encourage inquiry, while

building and maintaining its collections in trust for future generations.[88]
Based on its mission statement, the Gallery's identified activities of priority include
exhibitions, education, collection, and conservation. But, the mission statement also
emphasizes the visitor experience: interaction, engagement, and learning. How does
this emphasis manifest itself in practice at the Yale University Art Gallery?

Notably, in 2012, following the Gallery's $135 million renovation and
reopening to the public, *The New York Times* published Holland Cotter's gushing
review of the project: "For decades we've had an art culture that tries to wow us with
too muchness – blockbusters, biennials, bank-breaking museum buildings no one
needs – and that ends up delivering way too little. Could it be that the day of just
enough is upon us, and that Yale's just right museum is a bellwether?"[89]

Yale student and Gallery tour guide Zoe Mercer-Golden painted a slightly
different image of this university museum when she authored a blog post entitled
"Students in the Museum: From Inside the Ivy Covered Walls" for the blog of the
American Alliance of Museums' Center for the Future of Museums in March 2013,
just a few months after the Gallery's reopening. She wrote that students at Yale rarely
visit the Gallery unless required to do so for class meetings or assignments, and she
rhetorically asked readers how the Gallery might increase student engagement: "do we

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[88] "Mission," Yale University Art Gallery, accessed March 5, 2014,
http://artgallery.yale.edu/about-mission.

[89] Holland Cotter, "Where Opposites Attract: Yale University Art Gallery Reopens
After Renovations," The New York Times, last modified December 13, 2012,
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/14/arts/design/yale-university-art-gallery-reopens-
after-renovations.html?pagewanted=2&smid=pl-share.

extend hours? Give specialized tours? Host free events? Reach out through teachers, deans, dorms? How do we balance being a museum for the local community and the world with being a museum for our campus and students, our chief constituents?"[90] Mercer-Golden concluded, "This problematic reality may be the gallery's fault, for hoping students will find their way in on their own, or it may be a fundamental problem with the way that students see art and museums – as a nice diversion but not an essential part of their lives and educations."[91]

Mercer-Golden's thoughts raise a few additional questions: what is the Yale University Art Gallery doing to engage its neighbors in the crime-ridden city of New Haven, Connecticut? Why should students visit the Gallery if they have not been invited? Why has the Gallery not extended hours, offered specialized tours, hosted free events, or reached out to students through their professors and residence halls? How is it serving its "chief constituents"? Arguably, the Gallery's maintenance of the traditional museum model has contributed to poor visitation and engagement among Yale students and the New Haven community at large.

2.3.2 Museum as Forum

John Cotton Dana, in the same 1917 "The Gloom of the Museum" essay, after pointing out rather boldly that the museum had become a temple disconnected from its constituents, wrote, "To make itself alive, a museum must do two things: it must teach

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[90] Zoe Mercer-Golden, "Students in the Museum: From Inside the Ivy Covered Walls," Center for the Future of Museums, last modified March 14, 2013, http://futureofmuseums.blogspot.com/2013/03/students-in-museum-from-inside-ivy.html.

[91] Ibid.

and it must advertise…Now seems to come the demand that the museum serve its people…"[92] Or, as Duncan Cameron envisioned in his essay, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum," museums must engage in education and outreach, Dana's teaching and advertisement.

In response to James Durston's article, "Why I Hate Museums," Ford W. Bell, president of the American Alliance of Museums, spoke about the relevance of museums in an August 2013 interview also published on CNN's website. After extolling the value of museums' educational and economic benefits, Bell explained that museums are "committed to public service, and many museums are filling the social service gaps created by the recent economic downturn."[93] These social services, as Bell elaborated, include public programs for children and adults with physical and mental disabilities, free courses like English as a Second Language and computer skills, and outreach to underserved communities.[94] In doing so, museums can at least partially meet the needs of their visitors, a notion that has become essential to the work of innovative museums today. How are museums embracing this idea, serving their visitors and surrounding communities, and engaging in such innovation?

2.3.2.1   Innovating at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History

The Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History (MAH), located in downtown Santa Cruz, California, exudes a commitment to its local community in all of its operations.

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[92] Dana, "The Gloom of the Museum," 27-29.

[93] "Are Museums Still Relevant?" CNN, last modified August 22, 2013, http://travel.cnn.com/are-museums-still-relevant-today-543771.

[94] Ibid.

The MAH's mission is "to ignite shared experience and unexpected connections. We accomplish this mission when we bring people together around art and history through dynamic exhibitions, events, partnerships, and programs."[95] In this vein, the MAH's vision "is to become a thriving, central gathering place where local residents and visitors have the opportunity to experience art, history, ideas, and culture. We envision engaged members and visitors who are increasingly passionate and knowledgeable about contemporary art and local history that celebrate our diverse community."[96] Like the traditional museums aforementioned, the MAH is dedicated to exhibition, education, and preservation activities.

However, the MAH's innovation in embracing the field's paradigm shift is manifested in its visitor-centric operations. In addition to presenting engaging, relevant exhibitions and participatory programs that are designed to build social capital, or forge social connections between visitors, the MAH strives to forge partnerships with underserved communities and local organizations. For example, as one tenet of this commitment, the MAH hosts almost-monthly "pop up museums." A pop up museum is "a temporary exhibit created by the people who show up to participate. It works by choosing a theme and location, and inviting people to bring something on topic to share."[97] As an outreach program, the MAH's pop up museum model forges connections between the MAH and partnering agencies, empowers

[95] "About," Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, accessed March 10, 2014, http://www.santacruzmah.org/about/.

[96] Ibid.

[97] "Pop Up Museum," Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, accessed March 10, 2014, http://www.santacruzmah.org/events/category/pop-up-museum/.

participants, demonstrates that the museum values visitors' ideas and contributions, and encourages participants to later visit the MAH. This contributes to creating an environment at the MAH that is inclusive, proactive, and responsive to visitor needs, each of which is a component of the paradigm shift at work within the museum field.[98]

2.3.2.2 Innovating at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum at the University of Illinois at Chicago

The Jane Addams Hull-House Museum (JAHHM) is a unit at the University of Illinois at Chicago that memorializes the vision of late-19th century social reformer Jane Addams. The mission of the JAHHM is to "preserve and develop the original Hull-House site for the interpretation and continuation of the historic settlement house vision, linking research, education, and social engagement."[99] This university-affiliated museum is much like the above-described Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History in that it is dedicated to traditional education, exhibition, and preservation activities as well as innovative community engagement.

For example, the Hull-House Museum hosts an ongoing series entitled "Re-Thinking Soup." The program series is, in the Museum's words, a monthly "modern day soup kitchen that is a public and communal event where we gather together and eat delicious, healthy soup and have fresh, organic conversation about many of the urgent social, cultural, economic, and environmental food issues that we should be

[98] Anderson, *Reinventing the Museum,* 2.

[99] "Visitor Information," Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, accessed March 10, 2014, http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/_museum/visitors.html.

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addressing."[100] "Re-Thinking Soup" operates through partnerships and service:[101] the

Museum partners with a local group – whether within the University of Illinois at

Chicago community or within the Chicago community at large – and engages all

participants in discussion that speaks directly to its education and historic preservation

missions while providing a direct service to Chicago's hungry. But, "Re-Thinking

Soup" is just one example of the JAHHM's furthering of inclusive and visitor-centric

values that are central to the museum field's paradigm shift.

2.3.3   Transforming Representation into Service: An Assessment of Museum Future

In *Museums and Community,* Elizabeth Crooke, Senior Lecturer in Museum

and Heritage Studies at the University of Ulster, wrote, "For many who are exploring

the future of museums, this idea of a museum that is more engaged is best achieved by

rethinking the museum as a place that must serve society, rather than being a place

that represents it."[102] In a word, "representation" encapsulates the traditional museum

model, where the institution's collection and preservation activities reflect an

overarching belief in the museum as having been created for the elite to enlighten the

ignorant masses. This is, for the most part, how the above-described Metropolitan

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[100] "Re-Thinking Soup," Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, accessed March 10, 2014, http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/_programsevents/_kitchen/_rethinkingsoup/rethinkingsoup.html.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Elizabeth Crooke, *Museums and Community: Ideas, Issues and Challenges* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 25.

Museum of Art and the Yale University Art Gallery operate, assuming a position of historical and cultural authority over their visitors.

In contrast, the contested paradigm shift currently at work in the field, where community engagement and public service become as important as scholarly activities to museum operations, is translated into practice by institutions like the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History and the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Notably, the museum collection remains essential to the realization of public service through the museum; collection objects and exhibitions are the vehicles through which visitors engage and learn. This model of the museum as part of a network of service-providers to a community aligns with the American Alliance of Museums' Code of Ethics for American cultural institutions, and arguably, an embrace of this paradigm shift within the field is the only means by which American museums can remain relevant and become sustainable in the 21st century.

To reiterate, it is difficult to assess what a museum should be, but the question of what a museum can be is certainly answerable. If museums in the United States begin to change, to embrace the above-described paradigm shift, and to institutionally prioritize service as a central component of their missions, they will not just survive sustainably in the century to come; they will meaningfully thrive.

Chapter 3

CASE STUDY: "IF OBJECTS COULD TALK…"

3.1   Introduction

The preceding literature review provides a theoretical understanding of the American museum tradition and the imperative for, evidence of, and controversy surrounding the paradigm shift currently at work in the museum field. But, in order to practically understand and evaluate the changes at work in American museums today, a case study was conducted at the University of Delaware's University Museums, which afforded the opportunity to experiment with such an evaluation of the paradigm shift in practice.

3.2   University-Community Partnerships

3.2.1   Overview

This case study is not only an assessment of the role of museums in their surrounding communities, but it is also a response to the University of Delaware's call to serve and engage its neighbors. In fact, throughout the United States, other universities have striven and are continually striving to work in partnership with their local communities as well. Why? In the Preface to *Pursuing Opportunities through Partnerships: Higher Education and Communities*, the textual product of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Expanding Community Partnerships Program, Ronald W. Richards, Professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, explained, "There is little

doubt that communities and universities have very different cultures, mainly because they have very different concerns. Universities, on one hand, see themselves as the source of new knowledge. Communities, on the other hand, see themselves as the users of that knowledge."[103] These differences provide motivation for universities and their surrounding communities to work together for mutual benefit, but these different cultures and perspectives are also a source of tension between the two, commonly referred to as town-gown conflict.

Historically, town-gown conflict was problematic even at the earliest medieval universities in Europe. In 12th-century Oxford, England, for example, Oxford University was both a source of town governance and town-gown riots that left upwards of one hundred students and townspeople dead at a time. Now, in the 21st-century United States, tensions between universities and their neighbors range from disrespectful and rowdy students living in rental homes in local neighborhoods to traffic and parking issues as universities engage in extensive construction projects. Blake Gumprecht, author of *The American College Town,* explains, "Much of the conflict is the simple result of what happens when so many young people, free from parental supervision for the first time, descend upon relatively small cities. The other critical characteristic that divides town and gown is the fact that higher education

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[103] Ronald W. Richards, preface to *Pursuing Opportunities through Partnerships: Higher Education and Communities,* by Bruce A. Behringer, Bert C. Bach, Howard Daudistel, and James W. Fraser (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2004), 17.

institutions located outside big cities often dominate a town physically, economically, and politically."[104]

3.2.2 The University of Delaware and the City of Newark

The University of Delaware, located in Newark, Delaware, brings over 17,000 undergraduates[105] to Newark, a city roughly the same size[106] as the undergraduate student body, effectively doubling the population during the school year. Naturally, town-gown tensions are quite prevalent in Newark and have been for many years, dating to the 18th century.

During the colonial era, for example, students lamented that local residents charged unreasonably high rates for their rental properties. Small tensions such as these continued to escalate as the University expanded, most notably after World War II, when enrollment at the University of Delaware, like other universities, increased substantially. Throughout the University's history, the most persistent problems have been student behavior, from conflicts between students and local youth to pranks, drinking, and partying; migration of students into single-family neighborhoods, starting in the 1960s; and campus development, expansion, and associated

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104 Blake Gumprecht, *The American College Town* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 297.

105 "About Us," University of Delaware, accessed March 15, 2014, http://www.udel.edu/aboutus/.

106 "Facts & Figures," City of Newark, Delaware, accessed March 15, 2014, http://cityofnewarkde.us/index.aspx?nid=281.

construction.[107] One such development campaign is at the root of the town-gown

tension addressed in this case study, discussed below.

Over time, the University and the City of Newark have engaged in

collaborative partnerships to address these town-gown tensions, but these have been

only minimally effective. The two have worked together most closely to combat

student behavioral issues, arguably one of the most frustratingly persistent problems

with which the University and City have grappled and continue to do so. For example,

Newark created a Town & Gown Committee, with representative city officials,

university administrators, students, and residents, to voice and address concerns.[108]

However, the Committee was seen as having little power and dissolved in 2011,

largely due to poor attendance and participation.[109] Newly elected Mayor of Newark,

Polly Sierer, has hopes of re-establishing the Town & Gown Committee to continue

working on the town-gown tensions that remain prevalent in Newark.[110]

While Newark may soon seek a more collaborative relationship with the

University, community engagement is certainly part of the University's institutional

focus, regardless of how that commitment materializes itself in the behavior of

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[107] Gumprecht, *The American College Town,* 298-326.

[108] Gumprecht, *The American College Town,* 331-332.

[109] Cady Zuvich, "Newly-elected mayor answers questions on goals, new bike plan,"
The Review, last modified February 25, 2014, http://udreview.com/2014/02/25/newly-
elected-mayor-answers-questions-on-goals-new-bike-plan/.

[110] Ibid.

students and associated town-gown problems. The University of Delaware's mission statement stipulates:

> The University of Delaware exists to cultivate learning, develop knowledge and foster the free exchange of ideas. State-assisted yet privately governed, the University has a strong tradition of distinguished scholarship, research, teaching and service that is grounded in a commitment to increasing and disseminating scientific, humanistic and social knowledge for the benefit of the larger society…[111]

The University's mission statement is supplemented by its statement of responsibility, which reads, "The University of Delaware community values both personal and academic freedom. All members of the campus community have the personal responsibility to promote an atmosphere of civility in which the free exchange of ideas and opinions can flourish…" [112] In this University literature, an emphasis is placed on service and the free exchange of knowledge; both speak to an institutional commitment to the greater good, which includes the City of Newark.

In July 2007, University President Patrick T. Harker appointed a Strategic Planning Committee to define the University of Delaware's priorities for the future.[113] The result of this planning initiative was the University of Delaware's Path to

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[111] "About Us."

[112] "Mission Statement," University of Delaware, accessed March 15, 2014, http://www.udel.edu/aboutus/.

[113] "Strategic Planning Report for the University of Delaware," University of Delaware Strategic Planning Committee, last modified April 2008, http://www.udel.edu/prominence/pdfs/SPC_Report_Apr_08.pdf.

Prominence, adopted in May 2008. The Path to Prominence articulates the University's mission in light of its aspiration, according to President Harker, "to be recognized around the world as one of the great public institutions of higher education in America."[114] Many of the guiding principles embodied by the Path to Prominence speak directly to the relationship between the University of Delaware and its surrounding community, particularly the principles "Partnership" and "Impact." "Partnership" refers to the University's creation of "innovative partnerships for economic and community development, building knowledge and promoting ideas that serve the critical needs of the state, the nation, and the world," while "Impact" is the University's conviction that:

> Our job is not done until our ideas, our expertise, and our students are given the opportunity to make a significant difference in the world. To succeed, we must assure that the University's innovation, excitement, and accomplishments are publicly known throughout Delaware, academia, and across the nation and the world.[115]

Finally, the University announced, in September 2013, that a specialized task force was then authoring the University's application to the Carnegie Foundation for

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[114] "Progress Along Our Path to Prominence," University of Delaware Strategic Planning Committee, last modified December 2010, http://www.udel.edu/prominence/pdfs/P2P_Progress_Update.pdf.

[115] "Path to Prominence: Guiding Principles," University of Delaware, accessed March 15, 2014, http://www.udel.edu/prominence/principles.html.

the Advancement of Teaching's Community Engagement Classification.[116] This

application process connects directly to the University's Path to Prominence, in which

one of the milestones is "The Engaged University," a focus on promoting public

service and "engagement with our local communities in Delaware and with the

world."[117] The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification application process

afforded the University the opportunity to evaluate the progress it has made and is

making in engaging its surrounding communities, particularly the City of Newark.

The application was due in April 2014, with results to be announced in January

2015.[118] The outcome of the application process will again present the University

with an opportunity to celebrate its current community collaborations and to continue

building partnerships, for both the alleviation of local town-gown tensions and the

University' s contribution to the greater good.

3.2.2.1 The University Museums' Role in Community Engagement at the University of Delaware

As a unit of the University of Delaware, the University Museums, comprised

of the Old College Gallery, Mechanical Hall Gallery, and Mineralogical Museum, has

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116 "Carnegie task force announced: UD task force is to reach out regarding Community Engagement Classification," UDaily, last modified September 13, 2013, http://www.udel.edu/udaily/2014/sep/carnegie-engagement-091313.html.

117 "Path to Prominence: The Engaged University," University of Delaware, accessed March 15, 2014, http://www.udel.edu/prominence/mengaged.html.

118 "Classification Description: Community Engagement Elective Classification," Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, accessed March 15, 2014, http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community_engagement.php

a mission statement that fits the Museums precisely within the University's commitment to public service:

> The University Museums seeks to enhance the educational and scholarly mission of the University of Delaware through the exhibition, online presentation, study, preservation and growth of its unique collections…The University Museums enriches cultural life beyond the campus through presentation of the work of recognized artists, and through outreach programs to selected audiences…[119]

Drawing from the University of Delaware's and University Museums' aligned missions as well as from the museum field's arguable, albeit controversial, need to embrace the paradigm shift described above, the University Museums is poised to reevaluate its mission to "enrich cultural life beyond the campus" and, accordingly, take an active role in participating in community building and engagement, particularly within the City of Newark.

3.3 The University of Delaware and its Neighboring New London Road Community

The New London Road community, a historic African-American community in Newark, Delaware, is one of the University's neighboring communities. Tensions between the University and this community are persistent, drawn from the University's history of racial segregation and continuing through the negative impacts of the University's development and expansion into this neighborhood in the 1970s

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[119] "University Museums Mission," University of Delaware University Museums, accessed March 15, 2014, http://www.udel.edu/museums/about.html.

and '80s. Building on previous collaborative initiatives involving this local

community, the New London Road community was identified as a fitting population

with which to work in this case study, based on a variety of factors to be discussed

below.

3.3.1   New London Road Community History

The roots of the New London Road community, whose historic location sits

between White Clay Creek to the north, Creek Road or North College Avenue to the

east, West Main Street to the west, and the railroad tracks at the base of New London

Road to the south,[120] date to the early 1800s. African American laborers were

employed at farms, shops, and private residences in the vicinity of Newark, which led

to their building homes in the northwest section of town during the 1860s as well as

founding St. John's African Union Church in 1867. At this time, the New London

Road community was comprised of about a dozen families. By 1880, these twelve

families had grown into forty, and then about 150 by 1930. At this time, fire insurance

surveys show that in the late 1920s and early 1930s, this segregated community had

grown to establish and sustain its own infrastructure: shops, restaurants, social halls,

churches, schools, and cemeteries. The community continued to grow and develop

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[120] "Introduction to the New London Road Community," New London Road
Community Walking Tour, last modified October 2011,
http://www.artcons.udel.edu/public-outreach/new-london-road-
community/community-introduction.

through the 1960s, as a family-oriented community with a rich history of resilience, self-sufficiency, and close-knit neighborhood bonds.[121]

3.3.2 Mounting Tensions

The University upheld discriminatory policies towards African Americans through the 1950s,[122] and by the late 1960s and early 1970s, the community began to feel the pressure of the University of Delaware's rapid expansion, furthering the tensions between them. As the University built up its Laird, or North, Campus, located within the historic boundaries of the community, the community's population was dramatically reduced, houses were sold to the University or rented to students, and infrastructure crumbled. From 1980 through the present, community members moved away or sold their properties to both the University and entrepreneurs who would become landlords. [123] As a result, businesses failed and both the University and associated developers demolished and redeveloped the local properties.[124] Much of the community's historic fabric has been destroyed or at least changed significantly by

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[121] Bernard L. Herman, "Food Always Brings People Together: Art and History as Social Action" (paper presented at the annual meeting for the College Art Associaiton, New York, NY, February 14-17, 2007), 1-2.

[122] John A. Munroe, *The University of Delaware: A History* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware, 1986), accessed March 10, 2014, http://www.udel.edu/PR/munroe/chapter12.html.

[123] Herman, "Food Always Brings People Together," 2.

[124] Scott Goss, "Apt. project brings new access road for country club project," *Newark Post*, January 16, 2009, 3; Bernard L. Herman, "Letter to the Editor," *Newark Post,* March 13, 2002, 5; Mary E. Petzak, "UD hotel gets OK after much debate," *Newark Post*, February 27, 2002, 1-2.

this redevelopment, and many community members hold the University accountable for the loss of their physical community and sense of place.[125] Additionally, as in other Newark neighborhoods, community members who remain now live alongside student renters, who may be rowdy, disrespectful of community members, and unaware of their history. These factors have contributed and continue to add to the highly strained relationship between the University and this community, stemming initially from policies of segregation at the University of Delaware until the 1950s.[126]

Nonetheless, in spite of tension with the University and its students, community members remain proud of their history. For one, community members fondly reminisce through regular posting in an active Facebook group entitled "Home Town Newark." The community also "remains very much a part of the city's larger cultural and historical landscape:"[127] the community's three churches remain active, residents continue to gather at the Elks Lodge and the George Wilson Community Center, and community reunions, like holiday parties and a Juneteenth celebration, are well-attended and receive great support from community members near and far.

3.3.3   Building a Working Partnership

Beginning in the 2004-2005 school year, several University departments began to work on projects to address the strained relationship between the University and the New London Road community, collectively known as the Community Remembrance

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125 Herman, "Food Always Brings People Together," 2.

126 Munroe, *The University of Delaware: A History.*

127 Herman, "Food Always Brings People Together," 2.

Project. A group of faculty and students from the University of Delaware Art Department, Art History Department, Center for Material Culture Studies, and Center for Historic Architecture and Design convened with community members to design a project that would both celebrate and preserve the community's history. Faculty, students, and community members met at the Elks Lodge on Cleveland Avenue on several occasions to devise such a project to "remember, honor, and respect" the community in the form of a "monument" to the community. Based on voiced community requests and thoughts, several projects took form from 2004 through 2006.[128]

First, a sculpture project, grounded in the idea of artwork as means for social activism, was led by Art Department faculty member Virginia Bradley and Philadelphia artist Lily Yeh. After generating a number of sculpture proposals and selecting one, a full-scale model was created, and negotiations with the City of Newark regarding the monument's construction began. Notably, as the monument was constructed during the summer of 2005, the community raised concerns regarding elements perceived as phallic located at the top of the sculpture, but construction continued. Art students and community volunteers worked collaboratively to piece together the monument, involving placing a tile mosaic and painting. Lily Yeh left the project in August 2005, but the monument construction continued still, completed finally by the end of May 2006. Unfortunately, the sculpture, exposed to the elements, rapidly deteriorated and became structurally unstable. The conservation of the sculpture was intended to be the basis of an art conservation student's, Katelyn

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[128] Herman, "Food Always Brings People Together."

Uehling's, Honors senior thesis in 2010, but the community and Art Conservation Department together decided the sculpture should be demolished or removed from its location at the Elks Lodge.[129]

Concurrent to the monument's construction, University of Delaware art students also worked to create a quilt featuring drawings originally created by community members while brainstorming for the sculpture project with artist Lily Yeh. Unfortunately, the current location of this quilt is unknown.[130]

During the same 2004-2005 school year, the Center for Material Culture Studies undertook projects separate from the Art Department's mildly successful community-based art projects. Dr. Bernard L. Herman worked with students in the material culture studies writing and research seminar, a required course for students in the then-American Material Culture Studies minor, to create a monument of a slightly different nature. That is, they ultimately created two books celebrating community stories. The students working on the book projects, from a variety of arts and humanities disciplines, originally envisioned a letterpress book, but the idea soon evolved into two different books, *People Were Close* and *Food Always Brings People Together*. These book projects began with an extensive compiling of community history through oral history interviews. The students decided to use transcriptions of the oral history interviews in the books as a way to keep the books in the voice and words of the community members themselves. As the first book, *People Were Close*,

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[129] Katelyn Uehling, "Building a Relationship Between a University and its Surrounding Community: The Community Remembrance Project Revisited," (Senior thesis, University of Delaware, 2009), 35-36.

[130] Ibid., 36.

was completed in May 2005, featuring community stories and historic photographs, the second book was conceptualized.

The material culture studies seminar initiated the second book project during the 2005-2006 school year for a variety of reasons. Community members who had declined participation in the first project wanted to get involved after seeing the result of *People Were Close*, and while *People Were Close* was a gift to the community, the second book was undertaken as a fundraiser for community preservation and education. Finally, the emphasis on foodways in oral history interviews conducted for *People Were Close* revealed that there was plenty of work to do in respecting, honoring, and remembering the community in that vein. Thus, a "cookbook memoir" entitled "*Food Always Brings People Together:" Recipes, Poems, and Stories from the New London Road Community* took form, published in May 2006. After the cookbooks were delivered to the community, they were marketed through the Elks Lodge and three community churches.[131]

These books continue to be requested by community members and they may be considered more successful than the two projects completed by the Art Department for this reason. Dr. Herman said of the projects, "Our books didn't happen to our neighbors, they developed with and for them. *People Were Close* and *Food Always Brings People Together* were shared social actions that evolved through a partnership of community, faculty, and students."[132] But, unfortunately, as Katelyn Uehling noted in her evaluation of the book projects, high production costs mean that the books

[131] Herman, "Food Always Brings People Together."

[132] Ibid., 10.

likely will not be printed again for distribution to community members who did not receive one of the original copies.[133]

Still, this collaborative, working partnership established by the Community Remembrance Project was an opportune platform for continued work with the New London Road community. Unfortunately, the impetus for the next collaborative effort with this community came from the rapid deterioration, mentioned above, of the monument outside the Elks Lodge. Consulting community members, outdoor sculpture conservator Linda Lennon and art conservation student Katelyn Uehling determined the sculpture was deteriorating too rapidly to be preserved in its current location. Additionally, community members reported that they had witnessed students inflicting damages to the monument.

Uehling, Dr. Herman, and Dr. Vicki Cassman of the Art Conservation Department met with community members in the summer of 2008 to report that the monument could not be saved and to brainstorm ways to continue the partnership regardless. Uehling spent time conducting oral history interviews, making connections with community members, and holding community meetings through 2008. During this time, community members expressed a desire to highlight important locations throughout the neighborhood. The project developed into an initiative to apply for State of Delaware Historical Markers for several sites within the community (specifically, Mt. Zion U.A.M.E. Church, Rose Street Cemetery, Saunders' Barbershop, Terry Manor, and Bell's Funeral Home) and to create pamphlets with information about some of the community's important historic

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[133] Uehling, "Building a Relationship Between a University and its Surrounding Community," 31.

locations. At the same time, the University of Delaware began working on a website

to tell the community's story to a larger audience, and Special Collections at the

University's Morris Library began establishing an archive for the community,

providing an outlet for the preservation of historic community materials.[134]

After Uehling's graduation from the University of Delaware in 2010, her thesis

director, Dr. Cassman, continued working with the New London Road community to

translate the informative pamphlet into a series of video podcasts that present a

walking tour of the community. Working with Keith Rich, a graduate of the Art

Department's Visual Communications program, and Dr. Elizabeth Keenan Knauss,

then a graduate student in the English Department, Dr. Cassman and community

members created video podcasts with historic images and oral history recordings. The

twelve podcasts are now accessible through the Art Conservation Department's

website as well as YouTube; visitors are encouraged to view the videos on their

smartphones as they walk through the community. This project was completed in late

summer 2011, and showings of the podcasts were organized at the Trabant Theater on

campus in fall 2011 and spring 2012. Both showings were well-attended, and the

walking tour podcasts continue to be celebrated and appreciated by community

members. Like the book projects, community members frequently request DVD

copies of the podcasts.

At the end of the walking tour project, community members approached Dr.

Cassman and expressed their interest in continuing to work with the University and

develop a collaborative partnership.

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[134] Uehling, "Building a Relationship Between a University and its Surrounding
Community."

3.3.4   Collaboration and Participation at the University Museums

Between 2004 and 2011, the projects in which the University and New London Road community collaboratively engaged were forms of direct service to the community. In all iterations, community members expressed their needs, and University partners worked to meet them, whether through a sculpture, quilt, book, pamphlet, or digital walking tour. At the end of each project, a celebratory commemoration of the community's history was presented to community members, and both stakeholders asked the same question: what's next?

At this point in the University's relationship with this community, one could, after listening to the community's wishes and needs, formulate another form of a preservation project based in the arts or humanities, create it, and present it to the community. But at the end of this potential project, one might ask the same question yet again: what's next?

After working on so many individual, isolated projects with this community, slowly building the relationship between the University and the New London Road community, and asking the question of "what's next?" so many times, a new form of collaboration between these two parties was needed, one that would be both ever-evolving and sustainable.

Thus, with Dr. Cassman's existing rapport with New London Road community members, my interest in assessing the role of museums in their surrounding communities based on the paradigm shift at work in the field, and the hiring of a new Curator of Education, Ivan Henderson, at the University Museums in 2012, this case study was born as an effort to continue celebrating the rich history of the New London Road community while building on its relationship with the University, to improve community engagement at the University Museums and specifically introduce a

potentially sustainable model for collaboration between the Museums and this neighboring community, and ultimately, to assess the capacity for museums to contribute to positive social change.

3.4   "If Objects Could Talk, What Would Yours Say?"

Drawing on the goals outlined above, I worked with Dr. Cassman and Mr. Henderson beginning in May 2013 to design a series of public programs for implementation at the University Museums during the fall 2013 semester. The program series was collectively entitled "If Objects Could Talk, What Would Yours Say?"

3.4.1   Project Goals

Recognizing the University Museums' mission to serve audiences beyond the limits of the University of Delaware, the goals of "If Objects Could Talk, What Would Yours Say?" spoke to the Museums' commitment to community and visitor engagement, both of which are expressed in the Museums' mission.[135] By initiating meaningful dialogue between members of both the University community and the New London Road community, the program series aimed to facilitate visitors' personal connections to contemporary African American art on display at the Mechanical Hall Gallery in the fall 2013 exhibition entitled "Hassinger & Clark: Boxes, Combs and Constellations." Additional goals of the program series were to meet the New London Road community's expressed and demonstrated needs of

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[135] "University Museums Mission."

raising awareness and respect for its history among undergraduates at the University of Delaware, particularly those who live next-door to community members within the neighborhood's historic boundaries, and to continue to preserve its history in a format that can be passed down to rising generations, particularly to those who may not have grown up in the community. Finally, the program series endeavored to actively engage members of both the New London Road and University communities as a means of strengthening the social bridge between them and encouraging both to make greater use of resources at the University Museums.

3.4.2 Design Process

Finalizing the design for the program series spanned June through August 2013. During this time period, I met extensively with community members to get their input on the program design as well as exhausted web and library resources to draw inspiration from successful community engagement programs at museums in the United States and abroad, at both public and university-affiliated museums.

The original plan was to decide on the project's format in early June and present it to community members at their first annual Juneteenth celebration on June 23, 2013 at the George Wilson Community Center in Newark. At this point, the idea was to host a community-curated exhibition at the University Museums, featuring stories of the New London Road community around a theme drawn from the First Year Experience's Common Reader, Sonia Sotomayor's *My Beloved World*. The thinking was that the process of piecing together an exhibition with community members would be collaborative and engaging, and First Year Experience students, all of whom were required to read *My Beloved World*, would be eager to experience the exhibition, connect it to the Common Reader text, and learn about the New London

Road community in the process. As the Common Reader changes every year, the project could also change and evolve every year, becoming an annual, sustainable New London Road community-curated exhibition.

At the Juneteenth celebration, Dr. Cassman, Mr. Henderson, and I passed out flyers advertising an open community meeting we were planning to hold that Friday, June 28th at 6:00 p.m. in Old College 122. We also asked community members to vote on an exhibition theme that we could further discuss at the community meeting. Participation in our poll was fairly low; of the over fifty community members in attendance, we garnered less than ten votes. However, community members to whom we spoke about the exhibition responded positively, and we continued to plan on hosting the community meeting on that Friday, June 28th.

Unfortunately, severe weather on the 28th made for a very poor turnout; no community members braved the storm to make it to our meeting. A little discouraged, I decided we should reschedule the meeting. The date of our next open community meeting was Friday, July 12th at 6:00 p.m., again in Old College 122. Dr. Cassman, Mr. Henderson, and I were able to use the time between our two community meetings to rethink the original idea of a community-curated exhibition and brainstorm ways that the project could be better connected to the University Museums' fall exhibitions as well as better engage students in the process.

By the July 12th community meeting, the plan for the project had evolved. Upon learning about the fall exhibition at the Mechanical Hall Gallery, the on-campus museum of contemporary African American art, thematic connections to the New London Road community's history were striking. The exhibition, again, entitled "Hasssinger & Clark: Boxes, Combs and Constellations," featured the work of two

artists, Sonya Clark and Maren Hassinger. Sonya Clark is a textile artist whose work

stems from the premise that hairdressing was the first form of textile art; accordingly,

her works intricately incorporate human hair and combs (Figure 1). Maren Hassinger,

on the other hand, was inspired by the notion of "getting out of the box" both literally

and figuratively, and in this exhibition, she had created sculptures, or constellations,

from repurposed commercial packaging like cereal and tissue boxes (Figure 2).

The work of these artists seemed to provide an ideal access point for New

London Road community members: one of the community's focal points was

Saunders' Barbershop, the connection to Sonya Clark's work with hair, and Terry

Manor, a development within the community constructed by community leader

George Wilson, was built from repurposed materials, the connection to Maren

Hassinger's work in upcycling boxes. After identifying this connection, two new

ideas seemed feasible, a pop-up exhibition telling these community stories in the print

room of the Mechanical Hall Gallery or a community-based video project that would

capture these community stories, to be shown at a program at the Mechanical Hall

Gallery at some point during the fall 2013 semester. We decided we would present

both ideas to community members during our open community meeting on July 12th.

The weather was again poor on the 12th, but two community members attended

and provided extremely useful feedback about our ideas as well as contact information

for additional community members. After this meeting, we decided to pursue the

community-based video project, as the logistics for actually installing a pop-up

exhibition would be prohibitive. I then set about arranging individual meetings with

community members to record their stories about Saunders' Barbershop and Terry

Manor.

I recorded stories with nine different community members at five different meetings through the end of July 2013 (Figure 3). All community members responded positively to the project idea and were looking forward to seeing the final product at the museum in the fall. However, after recording so much footage, it was clear that this community-based video was not actually achieving the goals set forth at the beginning of the project. Though community members and students could come together for the final viewing of the video, the project did not encourage direct interaction between these two populations and would do little for strengthening the social bridge between them. It also seemed that the project was quickly adopting the style of those previously completed: the community-based video was, like the sculpture, books, and walking tour, a celebratory history project completed with input from the community but was ultimately neither ever-evolving nor sustainable.

For these reasons, Dr. Cassman, Mr. Henderson, and I returned to the proverbial drawing board at the end of July 2013. I brainstormed with additional faculty in the Art Department and Center for Material Culture Studies and tweaked the project idea yet again. In a format loosely based on the Portland Art Museum's "Object Stories" exhibition and corresponding virtual repository of visitor stories,[136] we ultimately decided, as aforementioned, to implement a series of public programs, "If Objects Could Talk, What Would Yours Say?" The three programs were organized around the "Hassinger & Clark: Boxes, Combs and Constellations" exhibition, each to be held on Thursday evenings at the Mechanical Hall Gallery during the fall 2013 semester. At the first two programs, we invited visitors to share

[136] "Object Stories," Portland Art Museum, accessed March 15, 2014, http://objectstories.org/.

their own objects and memories as they related to themes of Sonya Clark's and Maren Hassinger's artworks. The themes chosen for these two programs were, respectively, "hair" and "upcycling." Although these themes only superficially spoke to the ideas communicated by Clark and Hassinger in their works, "hair" and "upcycling" were thought to provide visitors with a non-threatening entry point to discuss the exhibition and their personal connections to it.

Accordingly, the "hair" program was entitled "Talking Shop," held on October 3, 2013 at 6:00 p.m. (Figure 4), and the "upcycling" program was entitled "Making Do," held on October 17, 2013 at 6:00 p.m. (Figure 5). Each program began with a short tour of the corresponding half of the exhibition, followed by a facilitated discussion in which visitors were given the opportunity to share their stories and objects or respond to "food for thought" questions that I drafted with students in Dr. Deborah Andrews' MCST402, Research Seminar in Material Culture Studies. The conversation at each program was video-recorded, which I then spliced and synthesized into a celebratory video, shown at our third and final program and reception, "Celebrating Our Stories," held on November 21, 2013 (Figure 6). A DVD copy of "Celebrating Our Stories" was distributed to all interested community members and participants.

The thinking behind the programs was that by giving visitors, ideally a mix of undergraduate students and New London Road community members, a chance to share their personal stories and memories, not only would they gain a personal, meaningful connection to the artwork, but they would also gain respect and a personal, meaningful connection to other visitors. Additionally, by providing DVD copies of the stories to participants, community members would have the opportunity to pass

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these stories down, in DVD form, to rising generations in their community. Finally, this project capitalized on collaboration between the New London Road community and the University of Delaware in a way not necessarily achieved by previous projects, outlined above. Namely, by demonstrating to both communities that the University Museums values their contributions and responses to its exhibitions, the University Museums can continue to sustainably serve both of these communities in the future.

3.4.3   Implementation

Prior to the program series' implementation, I publicized the programs through many avenues. I designed informational flyers for both "Talking Shop" and "Making Do" (Appendix B) and sent them via email to First Year Experience seminar leaders, Residence Life, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, Honors Program, Center for Black Culture, and relevant student groups and academic departments. I also posted copies of the flyers around campus in prominent locations, requested the publication of an advertising UDaily article, tapped into the University of Delaware's and University Museums' social media, visited several journalism and material culture studies class meetings to promote the programs and encourage participation, and submitted public service announcements to the on-campus radio station, WVUD. To reach New London Road community members, I visited each of the churches in the community, spoke with congregants, and left stacks of flyers. Mr. Henderson, Dr. Cassman, and I also canvassed the New London Road vicinity before both "Talking Shop" and "Making Do," going door-to-door, passing out flyers, and talking to neighborhood residents, both community members and student renters. I also reached out to other

local Newark residents by posting flyers at the Newark Arts Alliance, Newark Free Library, and Newark History Museum.

Ultimately, each of the two storytelling programs ran for just over an hour, filled with interesting and meaningful conversation. Although we had originally planned to show relevant video podcasts from the New London Road community walking tour at each program, we decided it might break the flow of conversation and opted not to include them.

Approximately twenty people, including two New London Road community members, attended "Talking Shop" on October 3rd. After presenting an introduction to the program series and Sonya Clark's half of the exhibition, I divided the group into two smaller discussion units, one that I facilitated and one that Mr. Henderson led. About half of the participants brought objects to share, and the others were willing to respond either to the stories shared or to the "food for thought" question cards. At "Talking Shop," we set up two video cameras, both directed by a University Museums volunteer, to record the dialogue, but also gave visitors the opportunity to speak directly to the camera in the style of the Portland Art Museum's "Object Stories."

On October 17th, "Making Do" was similarly well-attended, with about twenty people, including three New London Road community members, in attendance. After welcoming visitors and providing an introduction to Maren Hassinger's work, Mr. Henderson and I decided to keep the large group together for discussion in the main gallery. Working from the upcycling theme, fewer participants brought objects to share, but the conversation was certainly as engaging, if not more so, than the dialogue at "Talking Shop." We set up two video cameras, one stationary and one directed by Mr. Henderson, to record the conversation.

Finally, the "Celebrating Our Stories" program on November 21st began with a short welcome, followed by a showing of the celebratory video in the Mechanical Hall Gallery print room and a small reception with light food and drinks upstairs in Mechanical Hall. Over twenty people attended, including two New London Road community members, and all stayed for the entirety of the video showing. Many took DVD copies of "Celebrating Our Stories" to share on their way out of the Gallery.

3.4.4   Evaluation

Ultimately, Dr. Cassman, Mr. Henderson, and I agreed that "If Objects Could Talk, What Would Yours Say?" was a successful first foray into participatory programming at the University Museums, answering its mission's call to "enhance the educational and scholarly mission of the University of Delaware" and to "enrich the cultural life beyond the campus"[137] by serving students, faculty, staff, and local residents. Though I had hoped for greater participation from the New London Road community and though the students in attendance were either friends or friends of friends, the format was effective and engaging. Identifying a theme to guide the program and leaving the discussion open for reactions, comments, questions, and responses made for interesting and meaningful dialogue, a sentiment echoed by participants.

Although we did not employ formal evaluation methods other than anecdotal observations and brief conversations with participants, the comments both community members and students in attendance made were telling. Community members expressed how pleased they were to have met so many kind, thoughtful students, while

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[137] "University Museums Mission."

students remarked on how eye-opening it was to learn about the history of the University's neighbors.

To me, these comments reveal that the programs made a positive impact on several participants, confirming that the project was indeed successful and worthwhile. However, in the future, a more formalized method of evaluation might be employed to measure direct impacts as well as trends over time (Appendix C). Simple surveys, with ample room for feedback, including questions like the following would be useful:

- Did these programs add to the artwork's meaning for you, as you made connections between the artwork and your personal objects, memories, and/or stories?

- Did you meet anyone new? Or, did you learn anything new?

- Would you be willing or eager to join us for another program? Or, are you interested in returning to the University Museums?

Most importantly, "If Objects Could Talk, What Would Yours Say?" has provided a foundation from which the University Museums can grow in regard to community engagement efforts. This storytelling model, for instance, can be easily adapted to future exhibitions at the University Museums, especially because the budget for the programs is minimal (Appendix A). More so, the University Museums can now build on connections made with the New London Road community and the undergraduate student body through these programs to sustainably serve these populations in the years to come, to be discussed in the following section.

Additionally, many of the program's failings could be attributed to my novice status in many aspects of this project. I am not a marketing expert, and there are likely advertising avenues that I missed, avenues that may have attracted more community

members and students to the programs. I am also neither a technology expert nor designer, and the help of a skilled videographer and video-editor may have resulted in a celebratory video of higher quality and better aesthetic. In the future, collaborations with students, faculty, and staff with skills and expertise in these areas could result in a more polished final product.

Finally, drawing more community members and students – particularly students who are not friends or friends of friends – to the museum to participate would be ideal, magnifying the initial positive effect of these programs on the University's relationship with the New London Road community. One means of doing so would be to address problems of parking at the University Museums and transportation for elderly New London Road community members. University of Delaware Parking Services will post an hourly "do not ticket" for the Old College parking lot, closest to the Mechanical Hall Gallery and Old College Gallery, for $0.20 per parking space. Additionally, a carpool system for elderly community members who would like to attend might be developed to include this population. These are affordable solutions that may have a measurable impact in terms of participation in future community-based programs at the University Museums.

3.4.5 Future Growth at the University Museums

The University Museums' mission indeed speaks to outreach beyond a University of Delaware audience. In this vein, the positive response to these forerunning community-based programs at the Mechanical Hall Gallery suggests that participatory programming is a necessary, enjoyable, and worthwhile endeavor for the University Museums. In the future, community-based programming may expand to the other University Museums, the Old College Gallery and Mineralogical Museum.

Curator of Education Ivan Henderson plans to continue Thursday evening programming at the Museums in future fall semesters as well as to participate in the New London Road community's Juneteenth celebration in late June or early July to ensure sustainable future collaboration.

Specifically, in the coming fall semester, Mr. Henderson plans to implement between two and three Thursday evening programs with these target audiences – undergraduates and New London Road community members – in mind. He will be teaching MSST367, Museum Education and Outreach, which has a lab on Thursday afternoons from 3:30-5:30 p.m. These students may be interested in taking leadership roles in planning, publicizing, implementing, and evaluating these Thursday evening programs following their lab. Other undergraduate or graduate students interested in museum education as well as those students residing in the art conservation and art history Living-Learning Community in University residence halls may be able to be actively involved also. Additionally, I will be pursuing my master's degree at the University of Delaware through the next two years, so I am hopeful that I will be able to continue working with Ivan Henderson on community-based programming at the University Museums in the near future.

As seen in the initial success of this project, engaging local communities at the Museums is not only an important part of educationally interpreting the Museums' exhibitions, but also developing a relationship between the University of Delaware and its neighbors, building community among museum visitors, and in effect, contributing to positive social change. The University Museums' engagement with the New London Road community is particularly meaningful in this way, as bridging these communities through museum outreach addresses both the town-gown tensions

that come with transient student populations and the legacy of segregation in Newark as well as creates an environment of inclusive participation at the Museums.

Figure 1. Sonya Clark, *Aqua Allure,* 2005 (detail). Combs, thread and foil. © Sonya
          Clark

Figure 2. Maren Hassinger, *Hanging Boxes,* 2013 (installation detail). © Maren
          Hassinger

Figure 3. Ivan Henderson and I met with community members in July 2013

Figure 4. Participants shared objects and stories at "Talking Shop" on October 3, 2013 at the Mechanical Hall Gallery

Figure 5. Museum visitors engaged in discussion at "Making Do" on October 17, 2013 at the Mechanical Hall Gallery

Figure 6. Visitors gathered in the Mechanical Hall Gallery print room to view "Celebrating Our Stories" on November 21, 2013

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION: MUSEUMS AND AMERICAN CIVIC LIFE

4.1 Museums in their Communities

Current controversy within the museum field in the United States suggests that the role of museums in their surrounding communities is not an easy one to characterize. A variety of factors including, but not limited to, the size of the institution, the ideology of the museum's leadership, the collection and its condition, and the museum's geographic location informs the relationship a museum develops and maintains with its surrounding community. A historical tracing of the museum field in the United States illustrates that museums have increasingly sought visitors, but by what motivation? Have museums sought increased visitation to provide financial support for the institution, participate in public enlightenment and education, or achieve missions of community building and social bridging? From the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City to the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum (JAHHM) in Chicago, it is evident that every museum or cultural institution has a differently shaded answer to these questions.

Arguably, as the American Alliance of Museums maintains a focus on public service in its Code of Ethics,[138] service to a museum's surrounding community is an activity in which museums in the United States should engage. But, again, in what form does service within the museum materialize? The Met might argue that its voluntary admission fees provides New Yorkers with immeasurable and invaluable

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[138] "Code of Ethics for Museums."

anytime-access to one of the finest collections of art and historical objects in the world; the accessibility of its collections is its service to its surrounding community in Manhattan's Upper East Side.[139] On the other hand, the JAHHM provides food for body and mind at its monthly "Re-Thinking Soup" series, bringing together diverse audiences, ranging from college students at the University of Illinois at Chicago to Chicago's hungry, to enjoy social justice conversation and soup that connect directly to the historic narrative of the settlement house movement embodied by Jane Addams.[140] This form of service is both direct and empowering, speaking to the paradigm shift currently at work in the American museum field. Arguably, this form of public service is the kind that will contribute to the JAHHM's ability to sustain itself in years to come. Are visitors more likely to support and stand with a museum that welcomes their voices and contributes to a sense of community, or with a museum that, however unintentionally, excludes their voices and exudes an air of elitism in their community?

At the University Museums this fall, we pursued programming that would achieve a mission of public service as well as afford the opportunity to assess the impact of the Museums on social change, nodding to the notion of the sustainable museum aforementioned. By encouraging visitors to share their personal connections to the artwork on display at the Mechanical Hall Gallery, we sought to communicate that the University Museums is inclusive and dedicated to the free exchange of ideas

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[139] "Hours and Admission," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed March 15, 2014, http://www.metmuseum.org/visit/hours-and-admission.

[140] "Re-thinking Soup."

that institutionally underlines the University of Delaware.[141] By targeting two

disparate communities in the vicinity of the University Museums, the neighboring

New London Road community and the University's undergraduate population, we

sought to strengthen their social bridge, or the interpersonal bonds between individuals

between the two communities, and contribute to a broader sense of community as a

result. It remains to be seen, as the University Museums continues to use the lessons

learned from this project, its space, and its exhibitions for community engagement,

whether the social bridges forged in these public programs bleed out into the

community around the museum and contribute to positive social change – in this case,

easing tensions between the New London Road community members and their

transient college-aged neighbors.

Through this literature review and case study, it may be argued that museums

that take an active role in serving their communities in innovative ways are both

socially responsible and sustainable. For this reason, museums should take this active

role in serving and engaging their surrounding communities. Museums can do this in

a variety of ways, ways that align with their content and existing educational missions.

As Ellen Hirzy, consulting writer for the American Alliance of Museums' Museums &

Community Initiative, explains:

> Every museum has a deeply rooted connection with its community that is
>
> uniquely its own. However far reaching its collections and scholarship or the
>
> diversity of its audiences, a museum's particular community context anchors it,
>
> revitalizes its mission and sense of purpose, and enriches its understanding of

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141 "Mission Statement."

what is possible to accomplish…Civic engagement occurs when museum and
community intersect – in subtle and overt ways, over time, and as an accepted
and natural way of doing business.[142]

Civic engagement is a practice in which museums *can*, as seen in the above
literature review and case study, participate. Additional investigation into museums'
potential in the realm of community and civic engagement shows that this is certainly
a practice in which museums *should* take part, with reasoning that transcends the
ethical stipulations of the American Alliance of Museums.

4.2   Museums and Social Capital

Why should museums take part in building civic engagement through their
exhibitions and programs? Is civic engagement rather the responsibility of the
government and political system in this country? In fact, this role of museums and
other cultural institutions in community engagement has been the subject of recent
congressional hearings.[143] But, the answer to these questions more so revolves around
social capital theory and the role of arts, culture, and museums within that school of
thought.

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[142] Ellen Hirzy, "Mastering Civic Engagement: A Report from the American
Association of Museums," in *Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums,*
by American Association of Museums (Washington, DC: American Association of
Museums, 2002), 9.

[143] House Committee on Education and the Workforce, *Equipping Museums and
Libraries for the 21ˢᵗ Century: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Select Education*,
107th Cong., 2nd sess.., February 14, 2002; House Committee on Education and
Labor, *Examining the Role of Museums and Libraries in Strengthening Communities:
Hearing before the Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities*, 110th
Cong., 2nd sess., September 11, 2008.

Robert B. Putnam, one of the foremost scholars in investigating the impact of social capital on American life, writes in his 2000 book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community* that "the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value. Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a college education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so too social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups."[144] But, arguably even more important than productivity, Putnam found in his research that when social capital increases, so does health, economic wellbeing, happiness, and educational outcomes.[145] Put simply, when we make meaningful connections with others in our communities, our quality of life improves.

But, what does Putnam's social capital argument have to do with civic engagement, and where do museums fit into this equation? Elizabeth Crooke, in her book *Museums and Community: Ideas, Issues, and Challenges,* explains:

> Fostering social capital has become a frequent and popular policy issue – it is seen as a means to increase civic engagement and civic responsibility. By increasing community participation and enhancing community engagement, in various stages of local government, health promotion or education management, it is thought that more relevant and acceptable policy will be developed.[146]

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144 Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2000), 19.

145 Crooke, *Museums and Community,* 67.

146 Ibid.

Thus, building social capital within and between communities has a range of positive outcomes on both individual and societal levels.[147]

This leaves the question of how museums fit into this discussion of social capital and civic engagement, and the answer connects directly to the paradigm shift currently and controversially at work within the museum field. At the seventh Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America in June 1999, hosted by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, a group of community development practitioners and academics met to discuss the arts and social capital. One of the goals of the seventh Saguaro Seminar was to discern how the visual arts, and specifically museums, can increase social capital in their surrounding communities.[148] In 1999, the Saguaro participants reported that museums are "staying open later, creating singles nights, musical soirees, theme dinners, and group travel options to attract and entertain a wider audience. And museums are inventing programs that reach out into their communities."[149] Fifteen years ago, the Saguaro team saw that museums were beginning to engage their visitors in service-oriented ways and that these programs and efforts were creating social capital in their communities.[150]

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[147] Ibid., 68.

[148] "The Arts and Social Capital," Harvard Kennedy School: The Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, accessed March 10, 2014, http://www.hks.harvard.edu/programs/saguaro/about/the-original-saguaro-seminar-meetings/the-arts-and-social-capital.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid.

What has changed in the past fifteen years? The need to build social capital and, in effect, civic engagement persists in this country, as Putnam noted in his assessment of the United States' deteriorating social capital.[151] Stacey Maria Garcia, in her master's thesis entitled "Community and Civic Engagement in Museum Programs: A Community-Driven Program Design for the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History" writes of applications of social capital theory in museums, specifically at the MAH, today: "Unlike community engagement, civic engagement is not only about using the museum as a catalyst to bond and bridge relationships with individuals and communities but places the museum in a position to bring communities together in tackling issues of larger public and civic concern."[152] By engaging in community collaboration and participation that build social capital and civic engagement, museums not only contribute to the greater good, but they also become relevant to their surrounding communities. Achieving relevance through community engagement is one means for museums to become sustainable institutions in the 21st century, making the practice necessary, essential, and worthwhile for American museums today.

Some museums, like the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, have explicitly written community building and bridging into their mission and vision statements, while others, like the Yale University Art Gallery, have continued to rely on the historical value and rarity of their collections to both bring visitors to the museum and

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[151] Putnam, *Bowling Alone.*

[152] Stacey Marie Garcia, "Community and Civic Engagement in Museum Programs: A Community-Driven Program Design for the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History," (Master's thesis, University of Gothenburg, 2012), 34.

affirm their value to their surrounding community and society at large. At the University of Delaware's University Museums, we have endeavored to build social capital by bridging communities through participatory programming. In sum, museums can and, arguably, should contribute to their surrounding communities in this way, by collaboratively presenting exhibitions, preserving artifacts, collecting objects, and running public programs that reflect a greater commitment to community and civic engagement.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION: MUSEUM BRAINS MOVING FORWARD

With the progression of time comes also the evolution of ideology within the museum field. As the field continues to evolve, so inevitably will the University of Delaware's, and specifically the University Museums', relationship with the neighboring New London Road community and the Newark community at large. Not surprisingly, based on the preceding discussion, the role cultural institutions begin and continue to fill in communities throughout the United States will have implications on notions of American civic life and sense of place, both of which will then affect more broadly identity, culture, and social change.

From ancient beginnings as temples dedicated to the Muses in Alexandria and as fundamental components of European universities in the late 17th century, museums became private enterprises reserved for European elites to marvel and study their collections of exotic and oftentimes bizarre objects. Soon the first museums would open to the public in Europe in the 18th century, a model that would migrate to the United States in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.[153] Educational initiatives were developed as a means for public enlightenment at American museums in the early 20th century, and within the century's first few decades, museum professionals like John Cotton Dana began to challenge the theories that had underlined the operation of all

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[153] Alexander and Alexander, *Museums in Motion,* 5-11.

sorts of museums in the United States since their founding only roughly a hundred years beforehand.[154]

The line of Dana's thinking was picked up and further developed by museum scholars and practitioners through the remainder of the 20th century, from Theodore Low's call to focus on education in museums in the midst of World War II[155] to Stephen Weil's argument in the 1990s that museums must demonstrate their advantageousness to their visitors and local communities.[156] The first decade and a half of the 21st century has borne witness to additional development of this range of arguments as well as kickback from proponents of the maintenance of museum tradition. This literature review demonstrates, too, that this controversy is not a hushed dialogue restricted to those who work in museums: scathing articles like James Durston's "Why I Hate Museums" and Judith H. Dobrzynski's "High Culture Goes Hands-On" (the former notably spurring a heated online debate with over 400 comments submitted within weeks of the article's publishing), reveal that the public is alternatively perturbed by museums that remain ostensibly elitist and museums that become participatory.

The prevalence of controversy begs for an unbiased assessment to quell discord within the field once and for all. Of course, this is impossible in a field with such diversity of content, format, and training, but ultimately, controversy, or at best, respectful discussion and debate over the future of the field, is useful. Such

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[154] Dana, "The Gloom of the Museum."

[155] Low, "What is a Museum?"

[156] Weil, *Making Museums Matter.*

controversy was the motivation for the presented case study at the University of Delaware's University Museums, an effort to put participatory museum theory into practice and better understand the role museums can, and perhaps should, take in their surrounding communities, an assessment, more broadly, of museums and social responsibility. Is social responsibility in museums restricted to their treatment of culturally sensitive objects, or can, should, and do museums have some form of social responsibility to the communities in which they are located? If a museum can affect positive social change, should it?

These questions, to reiterate, speak to an overarching museum ethic. The American Alliance of Museums authored its Code of Ethics for Museums in 1991 and amended them in 2000. In regard to community engagement, the Code of Ethics now reads:

> Although diverse in their missions, they [American museums] have in common their nonprofit form of organization and a commitment of service to the public. Their collections and/or the objects they borrow or fabricate are the basis for research, exhibits, and programs that invite public participation...
>
> Museums in the United States are grounded in the tradition of public service. They are organized as public trusts, holding their collections and information as a benefit for those they were established to serve...
>
> Loyalty to the mission of the museum and to the public it serves is the essence of museum work, whether volunteer or paid...For museums, public service is paramount.[157]

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[157] "Code of Ethics for Museums."

The American Alliance of Museums, in its reference to public service at least six times in the introduction to its Code of Ethics for Museums, has issued a call to American museums to actively engage their audiences and serve their local communities. This declaration by the American museum field's unifying body raises two important points: one, though public service in museums is accordingly ethical, the priority of service within an institution remains controversial and challenged by traditional values. Two, what does a museum that, accordingly, makes public service a priority look like?

An endeavor to answer this question was made through a case study at the University Museums at the University of Delaware. Curator of Education Ivan Henderson, Dr. Vicki Cassman of the Art Conservation Department, and I planned a series of public programs to improve community engagement and assume social responsibility within the Museums. But rather than seeking to be "all things to all people," to quote Neil and Philip Kotler, as the first initiative of its kind at the University Museums, our public programs targeted a community that has historically sought a partnership with the University of Delaware, and vice versa.

The New London Road community, a historic African American community located in Newark, Delaware in the vicinity of New London Road, developed as a free black community before the Civil War. Through the Civil Rights Movement, the neighborhood exhibited remarkable self-sufficiency, resilience, and love in the face of the injustice of discrimination against African Americans in the City of Newark. The historic fabric of the community was compromised beginning in the 1970s, when the University of Delaware began to develop its Laird Campus, ushering in associated developers as well. The community became fragmented, and many community

members have harbored ill feelings for the University, holding the school accountable for the community's fragmentation.

In the early 2000s, the University began to intentionally reach out to this local community and develop a working partnership. After completing several commemorative projects, most recently the creation of a series of video podcasts that present a walking tour of the community, the need to continue to improve the relationship between the University and the New London Road community remained, especially as students continue to rent homes alongside community members, often treating the historic community with disrespect. Ideally, this project could usher in a new, sustainable model for collaboration between the University and the New Londoners through the University Museums.

Ultimately, the public program series at the University's Mechanical Hall Gallery, at which visitors were invited to share objects and memories around themes of the fall 2013 exhibition, "Hassinger & Clark: Boxes, Combs and Constellations," was successful. Participation from the New London Road community was not high at the programs, but those who attended expressed their appreciation and enjoyment. In addition, the University Museums are, as a result of these programs, poised to continue taking a dynamic role in working alongside the New London Road community as well as greater Newark. The storytelling program model can easily be adapted to changing exhibitions, but most importantly, the University Museums can build on these efforts in community engagement and public service.

As relevant, meaningful public programming continues to grow at the University Museums, in all three of its galleries, greater engagement with the University's surrounding community should be expected and welcomed. At large,

museums' involvement with their surrounding communities has the potential to bridge communities, such as in our case study at the University of Delaware, as well as contribute meaningfully to these communities through service in other ways. Service varies from museum to museum, but whatever its form, this kind of collaborative, needs-based engagement will contribute to making museums both relevant and essential components of American society as both stewards of cultural heritage and social change agents.

As social problems continue to (and increasingly) dominate the public discourse, museums are in a position to become the useful institutions John Cotton Dana envisioned in the early 1920s. As a budding museum professional, it is thrilling to listen to the dialogue within the field regarding this paradigm shift and to learn of the different ways museums are engaging and serving their local visitors, from innovative pop up museums at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History to a modern-day soup kitchen that pairs food with social justice conversation at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Again, Dana once wrote, "It is easy for a museum to get objects; it is hard for a museum to get brains." I believe Dana would have been proud to see so many museums getting brains, and I look forward to experiencing the boundaries these brains will push in years to come.

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Appendix A

UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS PROGRAM PROPOSAL

PROGRAM SERIES TITLE: If Objects Could Talk…

PROPOSERS: Katie Bonanno, Ivan Henderson

TIME FRAME:

> *Talking Shop*: Thursday, October 3, 2013, 6-8 pm

> *Making Do*: Thursday, October 17, 2013, 6-8 pm

> *Celebrating Our Stories*: Thursday, November 21, 2013, 6-8pm

LOCATION: Mechanical Hall Gallery

TARGET AUDIENCES: New London Road community members, University of Delaware undergraduate students

OBJECTIVE:

Recognizing the University Museums' mission to serve audiences beyond the students, faculty, staff, and scholars at the University of Delaware, the goals of this program speak to an overarching objective to contribute to visitor engagement by initiating meaningful dialogue between the University and local New London Road community. Foremost, the program aims to facilitate visitors' personal connections to compelling contemporary art through active participation in teaching and learning at the University Museums. Additional goals of the programs are to meet the New London Road community's demonstrated needs: to raise awareness and respect for its history among the University's undergraduate student population and to continue to preserve its history in a way that can be passed down to rising generations. Finally, the program will engage both the New London Road and University of Delaware communities to contribute to creating a social bridge between them as well as to encourage both to make greater use of the University Museums' resources.

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

As a program series to accompany the Mechanical Hall Gallery's fall exhibition, "Hassinger & Clark: Boxes, Combs and Constellations," we will invite visitors to share their own objects and memories as they relate to themes upon which Sonya Clark and Maren Hassinger draw in their works.

The themes chosen for the October events are, respectively, "hair" and "upcycling." These themes superficially speak to what Sonya Clark and Maren Hassinger correspondingly communicate through their works, but they will provide museum visitors with a non-threatening entry point to discuss the exhibition and their personal connections to it.

Each of the October programs will begin with a tour of the exhibit given by Ivan Henderson, focusing on the event's theme. Following the tour, Katie Bonanno will briefly present the exhibition's connection to the New London Road community's history: the walking tour podcast for Mr. Bobby's barbershop will be shown at "Talking Shop," and the Terry Manor podcast will be shown at "Making Do." After these brief presentations, participants will be divided into small groups where they can share their objects and memories with one another. Each group will be facilitated by a student (or students, depending on the number of participants) in Professor Deborah Andrews' MCST402, Research Seminar in Material Culture Studies. These students will be prepared to take the lead after participating in in-class discussions of the program and its goals. Ivan Henderson and Katie Bonanno will visit the MCST402 seminar in September to lead this discussion as well as to collaboratively draft "food for thought" questions to guide the discussion of participants' objects and memories during the programs.

During these discussions at each program, Katie Bonanno, Ivan Henderson, Vicki Cassman, and other volunteers will take video recordings of participants' stories. Based on the wishes of the artists, video recordings will either be taken in front of the artwork in the gallery, or in a designated location that does not include the exhibition as a backdrop. As visitors leave the museum, they will be asked to sign release forms to allow the University Museums to post the videos on their YouTube channel, ideally to be linked to the University Museums' webpage, and to incorporate into the "Celebrating our Stories" video to be shown at the closing program. Visitors will also be asked to leave their email addresses so that their video clip can be directly sent to them after each event. This way, each participant will receive a copy of their story to share.

The "Celebrating our Stories" program in November will begin with a showing of the "Celebrating our Stories" video, which will synthesize the videos captured at "Talking Shop" and "Making Do." Approximately fifty DVD copies of this video will be made for distribution to community members and others who attend. In addition, copies will be sent to all of the participants from "Talking Shop" and "Making Do," regardless of whether or not they attend "Celebrating our Stories." This program will also include light refreshments upstairs in Mechanical Hall.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

It is anticipated that participants in this program series will gain the ability to talk meaningfully about their objects as well as make personal connections to contemporary art. In addition, this program will meet two of the New London Road community's foremost concerns. One of these concerns is gaining the respect of University students, which will be addressed by providing historical background through the podcasts and by engaging students and community members in conversations around their objects and memories. The second of these concerns is preserving their history in a way that can be shared with their younger family members; by providing community members with copies of their individual stories and the "Celebrating our Stories" video, they will have the ability to pass down these stories to rising generations. Notably, this project capitalizes on collaboration between the University and the New London Road community in a way not necessarily achieved by past projects with this community. This collaborative project also captures a unique slice of the community's history as a result of tying the project directly to the Mechanical Hall Gallery's fall exhibition.

Bringing students and New London Road community members together in the museum space will not only work to improve the relationship between these two groups, but ultimately will also demonstrate to both communities that the University Museums values their contributions and responses to its exhibitions. The University Museums can continue to sustainably serve both of these communities in the future by using visitor feedback to inform the creation of programs designed to address community needs and interests. In addition to consistently creating programs which target this neighboring community, the University Museums may also consider providing a meeting place for the New London Road community as they begin to meet regularly to compile photographs and text for a proposed community-authored book.

EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Publicity
  - Program flyers
- "Talking Shop" and "Making Do"
  - Release forms, to be placed at front desk
  - Video camera
  - Camera
  - "Food for thought" question cards
  - Chairs, to be grouped in clusters of four or five throughout the gallery (with permission from the artists)
  - Laptop and projector, to be used in print room
  - DVD of walking tour podcasts
- "Celebrating our Stories"
  - Camera
  - Chairs, to be set up for audience in print room
  - Laptop and projector, to be used in print room
  - DVD of "Celebrating our Stories"
  - Refreshments and paper products (upstairs in Mechanical Hall)

APPROXIMATE BUDGET:

- Printing (program flyers, release forms, question cards): $40
- DVDs: $25
- University of Delaware catering: $150 (actual, $254.75)

Appendix B

## PROGRAM FLYERS

Our objects tell our stories.
A **curling iron** conjures memories of prom night and updos. **Plastic combs** forever evoke memories of grade school picture day. **Barbershops** elicit memories of hair cut too short, every time.

Share your object; share your story.
Bring your **HAIR** object or memory, and join us for "Talking Shop" at the Mechanical Hall Gallery, a night of art, community, and story-telling.

Talking Shop
Thursday, Oct. 3 at 6pm
Mechanical Hall Gallery
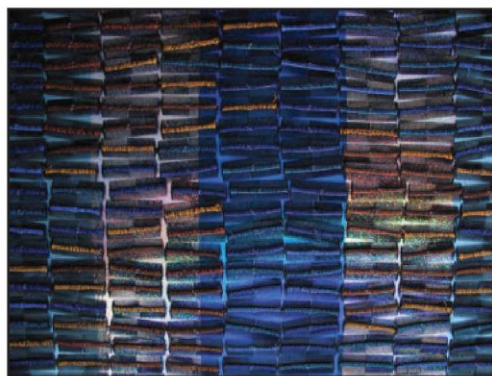
Sonya Clark, *Aqua Allure*, 2005 (detail). Combs, thread and foil. © Sonya Clark

University Museums
OLD COLLEGE GALLERY
MECHANICAL HALL GALLERY
MINERALOGICAL MUSEUM

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE.

Maren Hassinger, *Hanging Boxes*, 2013 (installation detail). © Maren Hassinger

Our objects tell our stories.

Newspapers are more than reading material; they are wrapping paper, garden mulch, and lining for the puppy's crate. **Bottle caps** are transformed into windchimes and refrigerator magnets. Unpaired **shoes** make charming planters.

Share your object; share your story.

Bring your **UPCYCLING** object or memory, and join us for "Making Do" at the Mechanical Hall Gallery, a night of art, community, and story-telling.

Making Do

Thursday, Oct. 17 at 6pm
Mechanical Hall Gallery

If objects could talk...

what would yours say?

Presented with the University Museums' exhibition,
"Hassinger & Clark: Boxes, Combs and Constellations,"
we invite you to share your **objects**
and the **stories** they tell.

How it works:

1. Identify an object or memory around the night's theme.
2. Bring your story to the museum to share.
3. We'll record your story, share it with museum audiences, and send you a copy, too.

Where to find us:

30 North College Avenue

University Museums
OLD COLLEGE GALLERY
MECHANICAL HALL GALLERY
MINERALOGICAL MUSEUM

Please join us:

Sonya Clark and Maren Hassinger in Conversation
SEPT. 18 at 6PM
Mechanical Hall Gallery

Talking Shop: Bring a **HAIR** story
OCT. 3 at 6PM
Mechanical Hall Gallery

Making Do: Bring an **UPCYCLING** story
OCT. 17 at 6PM
Mechanical Hall Gallery

What is UPCYCLING?
The process of converting waste materials or useless products into new materials or products of better quality.

Celebrating Our Stories: Closing Reception
NOV. 21 at 6PM
Mechanical Hall Gallery

Questions?
Contact Katie Bonanno at kbonanno@udel.edu

Appendix C

EVALUATION MATRIX: Adapted from outcomes model worksheet provided by Ivan Henderson

Katie Bonanno, University Museums, University of Delaware

We Do What?
Name of Program, Institution, Brief description of exhibition or program activities/products/services
If Objects Could Talk, What Would Yours Say? program series at the University Museums at the University of Delaware   - Improve community and campus engagement with the University Museums   - Facilitate visitors' connections with exhibition, local history, and other visitors   - Encourage visitors to think about how they personally relate to the artwork

For Whom?
Target Audience(s) + needs/considerations
- University of Delaware undergraduate students   - Newark's historic African American community   Engage visitors in group discussion around the exhibition themes, guided by questions that encourage them to make connections between their own lives and the artwork

For What Benefit/Outcome/Impact? (<u>No more than **3**</u> outcomes/benefits/impacts)				
Ways audience(s) will benefit / what they take away / how they are changed				
MAIN CATEGORY (Using GLO)	**SUB-CATEGORY Description**			
1. **Knowledge, Understanding**	**Visitors will better understand the messages being communicated by Sonya Clark and Maren Hassinger in their works.**			
Indicator or Measure *What would people say, do, leave behind that would convince you this outcome happened for them?*	**Applied to:** *(Who will you collect data from? Sample size?)*	**Data Source** Possible Method(s)	**Data Interval** *(When to Collect Data)*	**Goal** *(What do you expect will be the results?)*
Do visitors understand the connection between our discussion and the artwork?	Visitors who offer stories	Observations, informal conservations with visitors, surveys	At "Talking Shop" (Oct. 3) and "Making Do" (Oct. 17) programs	Visitors will share stories that are relevant

MAIN CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY Description			
2. Skills	**Visitors will gain an ability to talk about their objects within a material culture studies framework.**			
Indicator or Measure	**Applied to:**	**Data Source**	**Data Interval**	**Goal**
Do visitors seem comfortable sharing their stories?	Visitors who offer stories	Observations, informal conservations with visitors, surveys	At "Talking Shop" (Oct. 3) and "Making Do" (Oct. 17) programs	Visitors will share stories that are meaningful

MAIN CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY Description			
3. Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity	**Visitors will be actively engaged in conversation about art and memory with other participants.**			
Indicator or Measure	**Applied to:**	**Data Source**	**Data Interval**	**Goal**
Did the visitor meet anyone new? Did they express an interest in returning to the museum?	All visitors	Observations, informal conservations with visitors, surveys	At "Talking Shop" (Oct. 3) and "Making Do" (Oct. 17) programs	Visitors will reflect on the experience with museum staff and other visitors