

# Museums, Visitors and the Reconstruction of the Past in Ontario

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## Résumé

*La nostalgie du passé est souvent à l'origine des musées d'histoire locale de l'Ontario, comme de beaucoup d'autres activités du patrimoine. Ces établissements marquaient un retour aux sources et devaient transmettre les valeurs et les vertus des fondateurs de la collectivité, en présentant la société préindustrielle et rurale du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les expositions illustraient la vie des Amérindiens jusqu'à l'arrivée de la civilisation, puis celle des pionniers et des gens de l'époque victorienne. La même optique, soit la préservation d'une époque à peu près révolue, présidait au développement des collections et au choix des bâtiments de ces musées. Au cours des quinze dernières années, la nécessité d'obtenir de l'aide financière du gouvernement provincial et d'élargir l'éventail de leurs visiteurs a toutefois incité les musées locaux à changer d'attitude. Les pionniers sont toujours le centre d'attraction, mais les musées cherchent aussi à plaire à l'ensemble de la collectivité en incluant une programmation spéciale et en accordant une place de choix aux « nouveaux » pionniers, c'est-à-dire aux éléments multiculturels arrivés au pays après la Seconde Guerre mondiale.*

## Abstract

*Like many other heritage activities, community history museums in Ontario had a basis in antimodernist sentiment. These institutions served as spiritual guides that conveyed the values and identities of the community's founders. The image that emerged was one of a pre-industrial, rural, nineteenth-century society. The social groupings featured in exhibits were the Indians until they were displaced by civilization, the pioneers, and the Victorians. A similar approach was reflected in the development of collections and even in the selection of the museum buildings themselves: an attempt to preserve the rapidly-disappearing past. The need to attract provincial funding and broaden visitorship in the last fifteen years has led local museums to modify this tendency. Pioneers still abound but museums try to attract all of the community through the addition of special programming activities and the treatment of the "new" pioneers, the multicultural elements who have arrived since World War II.*

*Our first apprehension of modern civilization, it seems to me, emerges in the mind of the tourist.<sup>1</sup>*

## Tourists to the Past

Not all foreign countries lie beyond our own shores; some exist on the other side of time. We view these lands according to our present needs and capabilities. Both tourists abroad and visitors to the past<sup>2</sup> seek refuge in a place where authenticity<sup>3</sup> and contrast to the everyday present define the ways in which "things are done differently there."<sup>4</sup>

Like many other heritage activities, community history museums<sup>5</sup> in Ontario have a basis in antimodernist sentiment.<sup>6</sup> Antimodernism is a response to the perceived negative qualities of modernism, including loss of a sense of community, alienation from the family, and lack of personal involvement in the production of primary goods such as food, clothing and furniture. This sentiment shaped the development of community museums in Ontario and continues to influence the presentation of the past in these places. Although recent trends in academic historiography and museology encourage community history museum activities toward more contemporary

social historical themes and approaches to interpreting the past,<sup>7</sup> and away from pioneer reverence and nostalgic recreations, these latter interpretations still dominate in products designed to augment visitor attendance. The persistence of these presentations can be understood as a legacy of these museums and their continuing social function as civic organizations.

### **A Potent Legacy: The Pioneer Experience as Antidote to Modern Life**

When visiting history museums, prompted by a sense of modern alienation or nostalgia, a need to escape or a feeling of civic pride, tourists pick destinations created by individuals with similar motivations.<sup>8</sup> In the face of postwar immigration, urbanization, regionalization, and the disappearance of farms, homes, local businesses and traditional institutions,<sup>9</sup> the building of local museums<sup>10</sup> was driven largely by fear<sup>11</sup> of the loss of local character, and nostalgia for the idea of past values and past communities. As an observer of the 1953 founding of the Jordan Historical Museum of the Twenty explained:

*The character of the area began to change rapidly after the two world wars. The older families, fearful for the future, and nostalgic for the past were eager to preserve their pioneer heritage.”<sup>12</sup>*

This pioneer heritage was usually identified in its material shape – the form manifestly disappearing from the landscape, and easiest to collect.<sup>13</sup> Local history museums became known simply as “pioneer museums.”<sup>14</sup> Guided by the myth of the pioneer,<sup>15</sup> advisers to those involved in museum-making reinforced the fundamental role of collecting and exhibiting pioneer objects to offset the malaise of modern life. At the first meeting of museum curators in Ontario in 1954, Dr. Louis Blake Duff, past-president of the Ontario Historical Society, described the pioneer period as a time “in which men and women had purpose, perseverance, thrift and sincerity, qualities not as prevalent in our own age.”<sup>16</sup> Miss Blodwen Davis’s accompanying presentation “History at the Grass Roots,” underlined the importance of collecting pioneer values. She identified these as “decision, effort and cooperation,”<sup>17</sup> and saw them as an antidote to a modern age.

*Folklore, local history and the local museum, the cherry pitter and the apple corer, the coffee roaster, [and] the wooden barley fork recall*

*graphically a pioneer tradition we need to cherish and enjoy. The pioneer qualities which are disclosed in this kind of research are important to us in an age of standardization, mass production, mechanical entertainment and propaganda.<sup>18</sup>*

In contrast to a pioneer lifestyle, she added, “the whole trend of North American gadgetry is to make life easy and soft with as little work and as many possessions as possible.”<sup>19</sup>

Public interest in preserving and recreating the past through the creation of community history museums flourished progressively in Ontario after World War II. Louis Blake Duff’s 1954 dream to “pass some day through a succession of museums rising from Montreal to Windsor, from Hamilton to Fort William”<sup>20</sup> was realized within three decades. The number of community history museums grew from about 40 to over 400, accompanied by substantial increases in staffing, museum programmes and capital and operating funding from federal, provincial and municipal levels of government.<sup>21</sup> Initially, the material proofs of pioneer life were allowed to speak for themselves. Brief labels identifying objects with donors implicitly connected past and present through founding families. As private collections and historical society museums became more established into community institutions there was a paralleled push from the developing museological profession to incorporate relics into narratives that a general public could follow. The exhibit story-lines about the local past that developed were, not surprisingly, focused on the settlement period and told of local success and ingenuity, relying on extracted nostalgic, filiopietistic, and civic sentiments from the objects collected and displayed. The growing function of the community museum as a civic institution compounded the theme of pioneer virtue into a narrative linking honest struggle with civic success.

### **The Community History Museum as Spiritual Guide**

Although rarely acknowledged by individual institutions in such terms<sup>22</sup> the community museum in Ontario fulfils a fundamental role of moral and civic service. The moral motif that links the ideology of these museums is tied twofold to the idea of civicness; through objects the museum preserves and ratifies the values and meanings of the community’s past and presents these to the community for its benefit in the face of the uncertainties of modern living.

Fig. 1  
Label, Lang Pioneer  
Village, 1991.

As A. C. Parker suggested in his 1935 *Manual for History Museums*, museums "visualize the past for the benefit of the whole community making the values of the past potent in the present, and available to all citizens."<sup>23</sup>

These notions have continued to the present day. In 1957, American museologist Dr. Carl Guthe told Ontario museum curators that the role of community history museums was to epitomize the local memory, and in so doing, stimulate interest and create goodwill among citizens.<sup>24</sup> He underlined the civic importance of the local museum. Not only did it "furnish a field of reminiscences for old-timers," it also served as "a fund of comparisons for civic leaders," and "a source of pride and loyalty for the younger generation" including those yet unborn.<sup>25</sup> In 1969, curators were informed by a provincial museum advisor that community museums had the capability to help modern man who, "feels unsafe as if drifting without an anchor ... realize a new spiritual foundation," by relating past and present in ways which would express "a continuity of such depth and meaning" that it would "appeal to the individual on the highest level of his consciousness and understanding."<sup>26</sup> As a recent community museum guide to employees stated, "Museum work is a calling, a public ministry, a commitment to a better world through the enlightenment of the public."<sup>27</sup> Even as she launched into a dialogue on the lack of social historical interpretation at community museums in Ontario, a recent critic acknowledged, "Certainly the role of history museums is to create confidence, reassure and create continuity."<sup>28</sup>

Community museums are still envisioned as spiritual conduits, transmitting the values of the past in a moral narrative<sup>29</sup> to the present. Current museum statements of purpose confirm that these places serve by collecting, preserving and interpreting the past for the benefit of the present, with an emphasis on the founding and settlement of the community. In these mission statements the founding fathers or "pioneers"<sup>30</sup> are memorialized to educate the public "for its betterment."<sup>31</sup> This activity is a form of local nativism,<sup>32</sup> and frequently those taking part in it have been long-standing community members and descendants of founding families, engaged by their participation in preserving their own personal pasts.<sup>33</sup> The role of such museums fulfils the textbook criteria for defining folklore: they are places for amusement and escape, they validate culture, educate, and serve to maintain stability. As do myths, most

#### A TRIBUTE

Almost all of the buildings and artifacts  
in Lang Pioneer Village  
have been donated.  
Lang Pioneer Village is a living monument  
to the past faith, endurance and ingenuity  
of the pioneers  
and to the present generosity and interest  
of their descendants  
and those who came later to  
Peterborough County.

community history museums in Ontario explain the present and make the unknowable future safe by reference to a knowable, archetypal past.<sup>34</sup>

#### The Rhetoric of the Past: Material Culture as History

What is that archetypal past? Based on collections' types and museum presentation style, tourists to Ontario's museums see that Ontario's past, beyond its military fortifications, is mainly a rural, domestic place. Despite differences in the local past, the attention to settlement and Victorian periods as interpreted through material culture, and the production of descriptive narratives based on similar kinds of artifacts, has produced a certain homogeneity in the presentation of the past in Ontario's community history museums. Historic villages (which never existed) and historic houses are characterized by a defined timelessness, usually situated somewhere in the nineteenth century. These are cultural re-creations, synchronic and largely depoliticized studies, centred on artisanal and pre-industrial modes of production. Ontario has few industrial museums, and no ecomuseums.<sup>35</sup> With the exception of historic sites such as the Enoch Turner Schoolhouse, which depicts and discusses the issue of childhood and free schooling in 1848 Toronto, portrayals of social groups such as women, children, and First Nations frequently fulfil traditional stereotypes and beliefs about women at home, blissful childhoods and savage cultures. The metanarrative for museums with chronological galleries is the creation of civilization out of wildness, through local success and development, illustrated by improvements in material technology, the development of social institutions and the growth of the community. This is civic history at its most explicit,

and few museums have challenged this narrative with stories of local contention, desolation or social struggle.<sup>36</sup> Social issues such as industrial labour, cultural or racial conflict, suffrage, poverty, crime and so on are minimal in exhibits in these museums. Instead, one sees, even in local history museums with chronological gallery exhibits, mainly local culture in the form of three dominant groups: pioneers, Victorians, and Indians.<sup>37</sup>

Travelling over the museum landscape in Ontario, one is immediately struck by the overwhelming presence of pioneers. They are everywhere. Whole villages are stocked with them – and named after them – Black Creek Pioneer Village, Muskoka Pioneer Village, Lang Pioneer Village and Fanshawe Pioneer Village. Pioneers are the past in residence in 24 of 42 historic houses examined, and dwell in the primary sections of local history museum galleries. Based on these presentations we learn that pioneers lived in log cabins, and were in order of frequency of appearance in museums, United Empire Loyalist or British (mainly Scottish), Pennsylvania-German Mennonites, Quakers, escaped Black slaves, Irish or French-Canadian.<sup>38</sup> With the exception of the latter two groups, the pioneers are chiefly Protestant. Pioneers worked industriously to “make do”

and fashioned most of their material goods by hand. Most importantly, they were our community founders. The attributes associated with the pioneers are masculine, moral ones: self-sufficiency, industry, honest struggle, productivity and resourcefulness.<sup>39</sup> Pioneers are most frequently depicted working the land, spinning, churning butter, or baking in an open hearth.<sup>40</sup> These relatively poor folk, with their sparse homes in the wilderness, live in greatest contrast to those of us who dwell in the late twentieth-century. However, there is a species of wealthy pioneer, especially in the southern part of the province, known as Georgians, who serve to inspire us with their good taste in neoclassic or Regency architecture and furnishings.<sup>41</sup>

Succeeding the pioneers and in growing numbers are the “Victorians.” Like the pioneers, this group is defined in exhibits less by a temporal period<sup>42</sup> and more by its outstanding characteristics. These traits are shown to be in sharp contrast to the producer-ethics of the pioneers.<sup>43</sup> Chief among these are a certain feminine social and aesthetic sensibility, expressed through restrained behaviour and rampant consumerism. Victorians are quintessentially middle class professionals. Unlike pioneers, they do not handmake fundamental



**Fig. 2**  
*Edwardian general store exhibit, Welland Historical Museum, 1991.*

items like candles. Instead they do "handiwork," a form of useful, artistic, leisure. They engage, for instance, in a seemingly endless production of needlework.<sup>44</sup> They decorate interiors to a suffocating magnitude and have a particular focus on the parlour as a place of social importance.<sup>45</sup> They incorporate a range of unwieldy gadgetry in their daily occupations<sup>46</sup> and, unlike pioneers, seem to spend a good deal of time indoors, in various forms of elaborate dress.<sup>47</sup> They are preoccupied with social ceremonies and rites of passage, such as christenings, weddings and funerals.<sup>48</sup>

The Indians in lesser numbers, that become completely extinguished by the pioneers, have no relationship to the pioneers or Victorians, or for that matter to most of the tourists.<sup>49</sup> Indians are evidenced by the archaeological remains of their forbears, maps showing their original lands and migration patterns, artifactual vestiges of a lifestyle tied to the land, and discussions of myth and cultural practice. They are the savages that predate or are removed by civilization, and rarely surface again.<sup>50</sup>

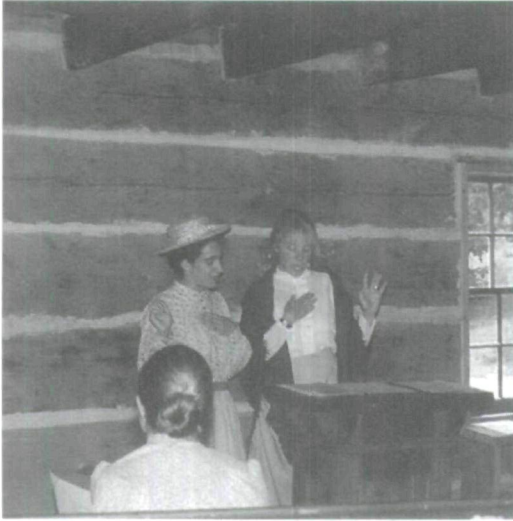
Finally, the others, the Edwardians, the soldiers and pre or early post World War I people, industries and organizations occupy a vague and diminished place in Ontario's past. Edwardians appear in much smaller numbers in historic villages or historic houses, populate local history museum streetscape and storefront exhibits,<sup>51</sup> or linger in small showcases at the end of local museum history galleries.

These are, of course, conventionalized presentations, but they are soundly sustained by the policies, collecting, cataloguing categories, exhibits and interpretive programmes at Ontario's community museums. They are descriptions mediated by museum type and, for a number of reasons, are presentations in the process of change at many sites.

The status quo presentations of the past in Ontario history museums have been described here as a product of fear intersecting material obsolescence. That juncture also featured local initiative uniting with government grants to cover museum development or operating costs. In the process of salvaging threatened buildings and objects, there seemed to have been little opportunity or criteria, beyond the object being old, and fitting into a display or storage space<sup>52</sup> to critically assess what should and should not be rescued. The result was the amassing of rambling collections in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, in less than desirable conditions, frequently under the direction of volunteers untrained in museum management. A con-

sequence of this activity was the development of a museum professional organization, which along with academic institutions introduced certificate and degree courses in museum work in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>53</sup> With capital and operating costs escalating as museums established, upgraded, and moved from volunteer to professional management, a change of governance from historical societies to municipalities took place,<sup>54</sup> accompanied by a growth in provincial advisory services and grants to community museums. Immediately following the introduction of the community museums' policy for Ontario in 1980, museums seeking operating support from the Province were required to meet a series of minimum operating standards to direct, and put an end to, the topsy-turvy growth of collections and museums that characterized the 1960s and 1970s, and to integrate the museums more fully into their communities.<sup>55</sup>

As a result of these influences, the three most fundamental changes in the operation of community museums in Ontario during the last fifteen years have been the improved care and management of collections, a shift from object-centred to community-centred approaches to operations, and a concern for historical integrity in the interpretation of the past at these sites. Tens of millions of capital dollars have been directed by federal, provincial and municipal governments to community history museums in the last decade to upgrade facilities for better management of collections and enhanced interpretation of these materials to the tourist. A heightened sense of responsibility to the community has generated a substantial increase in the production of school programmes, public programmes and special events, rotating exhibits and other activities designed to appeal to, and attract the public. In addition, museological literature and conferences have vigorously advocated for social historical approaches to studying the past.<sup>56</sup> Museums are revising statements of purpose and altering their collections and portfolios of programs to address these concerns, which have been implemented where human and financial resources exist to address them. Curatorial recognition of the complexity of the past, and concern about the historically questionable portrayals that have prevailed in Ontario's history museums, has generated the introduction of social and cultural historical perspectives and themes into the museum narrative, perspectives which effectively subvert the pioneer myth and expose anxieties and profanities of the



**Fig. 3**  
*Temperance meeting re-enactment, Muskoka Pioneer Village, 1991.*

local past. In addition, this portrayal of social history is often projected into what one might call the modern age, the period after World War I. This revisionist work is an onerous undertaking, hampered by a shortage of resources to change traditional venues, difficulties in researching and interpreting social history themes with material culture,<sup>57</sup> and the almost addictive nostalgic response to the past that museum visitors seem to enjoy.

### Subverting the Pioneer

Doon Heritage Crossroads is a revised, former nineteenth-century pioneer village with a new cut-off date of 1914. Instead of inviting us to come back to a “better place in time,” this museum’s brochure warns us up-front about social and economic problems affecting rural Waterloo County at the dawn of World War I. Along with other museums such as Black Creek Pioneer Village, Muskoka Pioneer Village and Upper Canada Village, these once “peaceable kingdoms” are now interpreting alcoholism and temperance, women’s suffrage, workers and unions, and personal bankruptcy on the family farm. This method of interpretation frequently takes its form in the use of isolated theatrical dramas implanted into the otherwise traditional daily portrayals at these sites.<sup>58</sup> Collecting for this kind of interpretation of the past, at least as it has been compiled at Doon Heritage Crossroads, relies a lot more on oral, and documentary sources than material effects.

Gallery history museums are also investigating parts of the past previously neglected in both artifacts and story lines. Like many other social historical exhibits, the Halton Regional

Museum’s modest display in 1991 on childhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries looked to relevant scholarly literature and contextualized the local situation within that material. Thus the exhibit on childhood at the turn of the twentieth century examined questions about infant feeding and nourishment, infant mortality and the development of an industry and consumer market for specialized children’s furniture, using local examples and materials. Interpretations of local industry look at the worker’s perspective when possible, and again much of this involves new collecting of



**Fig. 4**  
*Industrial artifacts in storage at Welland Historical Museum. Left to right: watchman’s flashlight, Atlas Steels hardhat (1960), Stelpipe hardhat (1990), adding machine from United Electrical Workers, lunch box from Union Carbide, lunch box from Stokes Rubber, warning sign from Page Hersey pipe collected in Welland Flour and Feed Mill. (Courtesy Welland Historical Museum)*

artifacts, documents and oral histories not previously collected in the spirit of the pioneer. For instance, the Welland Historical Museum’s 1991 accessions included a Union Carbide lunch box, as well as many photographs and documents from heavy industries in the area that have recently closed their doors. The curator has also collected oral histories from welders concerning work on the Welland Canal. These industrial and occupational histories are communicated in the museum in other formats, such as a 1991 “Festival of Work and Labour Experience” where both retired and still active workers reminisced and shared their work stories and experiences. Other industrial history exhibits included a well-researched display at the Macaulay Heritage Park on the growth and decline of the canning industry in Prince Edward County. Interest in industry and occupation has been matched with attention to gender roles and local history. The Welland Historical Museum used interviews, photographs, and videos as well as artifacts to support a 1990 exhibit titled “Women Working in Welland,” which examined women and work in local domestic, clerical and industrial jobs from 1850 to 1950. Likewise Brant County Museum’s 1990 display, “Changes on the Do-

mestic Front" and the Chatham-Kent Museum's 1989 exhibit, "A Woman's Work" looked at the changing role of women and work over the last century. The Peterborough Centennial Museum and Archives produced "Ordinary Women ... Everyday Lives," a 1989 exhibit on the challenges of researching women's history in Peterborough from 1850 to 1940. In the same year the Raleigh Township Centennial Museum examined the significance of Black women in the Black settlement of Elgin/North Buxton. Other social groups, such as brotherhood societies, have been the subjects of exhibits mounted in both historic sites and gallery museums.

Resources for the mounting of well-researched history exhibits that vary from traditional portrayals are often found outside the museum's operating budget. Like the St. Mary's Museum's 1989 "Country Comes to Town" exhibit analysis of interaction between rural and urban area residents and businesses in the 1920s, Fanshawe Pioneer Village's research on Irish immigration relied on funding and staffing through student employment opportunities. As a curator at a museum in Northern Ontario explained, it was easier for him to find funds to double the museum space than have someone paid a salary to conduct local history research.<sup>59</sup>

Beyond a shortage of resources to conduct such work, contentious social history exhibits can put the local history museum's civil obligations at risk. A travelling exhibit from the Museum of the History of Medicine "From Plague to AIDS: Lessons From Our Past" mounted at the Halton Regional Museum, and that museum's accompanying display: "AIDS: Halton's Response" was blacklisted and actively boycotted by the Roman Catholic School Board in Halton, because it discussed safe sex rather than adopting the "Just Say No" policy of the local diocese. After much negotiation in order to retain the high number of Roman Catholic school classes scheduled to visit the museum during the same period as this exhibit, the museum agreed to close the exhibit during visits to the museum by these school classes so that students would not be exposed to the exhibit's message.<sup>60</sup>

The attraction of such new approaches to the past to visitors at Ontario's community history museums is unclear.<sup>61</sup> The few studies conducted on tourist responses to social history interpretations in museums suggest that tourists are interested in recent scholarship that does not "require fundamental alterations in the museum or in its image as a nonthreatening,

entertaining destination."<sup>62</sup> Curators interviewed for this paper maintain that these exhibits lack popular appeal. Attendance was very low for the Welland museum's exhibit on working women, and surprisingly, since schools tend to be the most supportive market for these kinds of exhibits, no classes booked visits.<sup>63</sup> The Peel Regional Museum's 1990 exhibit on the Great Depression in Peel had a depressing result – few came. The curator was informed that people in the community did not want to relive or revisit that unhappy period of time.<sup>64</sup> The need to maintain and encourage high attendance figures does not seem to support energies directed toward the production of exhibits based on scholarly research of unpleasant or contentious local social or cultural historical issues. As the curator of Doon Heritage Crossroads pointed out, this museum's audience consists of three main groups, none of whom seem particularly concerned with these topics: conscripted schoolchildren, families who bring their children for a leisurely afternoon and seniors who come to reminisce.<sup>65</sup> His observation is supported by a scholarly analysis of social history interpretation and the allocation of resources at certain historic houses and villages in Ontario. The study concluded that lack of resources restricts historical research and revision at these sites to some degree, but that a much greater factor is the need to provide history moulded to the interests and tastes of the modern tourist.<sup>66</sup>

### **The Affecting Past**

Attendance is a key criterion used by community history museums to evaluate their performance in the community. Combined with increased operating costs (due in part to upgrading demands from the province in return for provincial grants), and a need to justify operations to local municipal councils that provide the bulk of the funding, curators have made great efforts to increase attendance at their sites through better marketing and the production and promotion of special exhibits and special events.<sup>67</sup> Despite some recent efforts in researching and producing exhibits and education programmes using social historical themes and methods, these approaches are in little evidence as products targeted for tourists. Instead antimodernism and nostalgia prevail.

Indeed, an analysis of brochures from 92 community history museums in Ontario shows that the most marketed concept at these museums is the idea of escape through time

# GOOD OLD TIMES

Fanshawe  
Pioneer Village  
London, Ontario



travel to a better past. Themes and bylines such as "Good Old Times,"<sup>68</sup> "Discover a Century Past,"<sup>69</sup> "Come Back With Us,"<sup>70</sup> and "Travel a Day in Time,"<sup>71</sup> predominate. With the exception of Doon Heritage Crossroads visitor's guide, this idea of escape is paired with nostalgic images of the past. Here especially historic villages and houses parlay their rural presence and domesticity into images to lure the twentieth-century world-weary traveller back to a "special place in a special time."<sup>72</sup> "As alive today as when Joseph's large, loving family called it home ..." calls out to us from the front of the Joseph Schneider Haus brochure beside a photograph of costumed young girls

and their mother sitting in front of a lacy canopied bed. Museum brochure pictures show happy, healthy people engaged in domestic, agricultural or social activities. These are people the tourist would want to meet, activities we can join. Like the Joseph Schneider Haus, they invite us to "pull up a chair for a chat in the welcoming warmth of the farm kitchen."<sup>73</sup>

While historic house and village brochures describe inhabitants' daily activities, home interiors and architectural structures, in a narrative of pleasant escape to a "simpler life,"<sup>74</sup> local history museums focus on particularly interesting or symbolic artifacts and galleries. Photographs or drawings on these brochures match the stereotypes of the past presented in the museum's interior. The most popular images (other than buildings) in order of use are: nineteenth-century agricultural activities (mainly horse-drawn ploughs), Victorian upper or middle class room interiors, spinning wheels or women hand spinning, weaving or carding wool, children playing, general stores, dolls, First Nations (not always positive images),<sup>75</sup> steam locomotives and butter churns.

While describing the usual goings-on at these places, brochures often include information on special exhibits and special events, both designed to increase attendance and broaden the base of support for the museum. Of approximately 375 special exhibits mounted for tourist or holiday seasons in the 1989–90 period that were examined, descriptive displays on pioneer life were the most frequent topics, followed by exhibits on Victorian material culture. Not surprisingly, the most recurrent special exhibit theme at community history museums in Ontario is Victorian or pioneer Christmas, with descriptive exhibits of costume or fashion next in number. Children's toys and games follow closely in frequency of exhibit theme. As the most common artifact group for depicting or discussing childhood, these objects portray lighthearted versions of childhood experience in the past. Exhibits of First Nations follow next in number. Except those produced by the native-operated Woodland Cultural Centre, most displays are either archaeological or deal with First Nations at the time of contact, confining these groups forever to a pre-civilized past.<sup>76</sup> Catchy names are used to attract the visitor to special exhibits: a display on women's underwear at the Aylmer and District Museum was coined "For Your Eyes Only."<sup>77</sup> "Hot and Heavy" branded an exhibit on domestic irons at Black Creek Pioneer Village,<sup>78</sup> and women's costume at the

**Fig. 5**  
*Brochure, Fanshawe Pioneer Village, 1992. (Reprinted with the permission of Fanshawe Pioneer Village)*



Champlain Trail Museum was labelled "Sugar and Spice."<sup>79</sup>

Special events are the most potent means of attracting tourists and increasing museum attendance. At some sites, such as the Markham Museum, such events accounted for over half the annual visitors in a year.<sup>80</sup> An analysis of 352 special events (and these are in addition to public programmes such as lectures, school classes, films and so on) from 88 sites shows these festivities to be places where the past is animated at its most accommodating. Although some museums feature historically appropriate entertainment for these events such as the Kettledrum performances at the John McCrae Museum, social history themes are not the primary focus of these festivities. Instead these celebrations bring together families and local traditional artisans in the joyful ways of the pioneer and Victorian past. A carnival of cooking,

eating and drinking, domestic crafts, agricultural activities, music, and dance provide for a two-way celebration of the past, and a pleasant opportunity for the visitor to feel they have learned something.<sup>81</sup> The events that take place are not necessarily contextually accurate. No re-enactments of Orange parades, which were held in many Ontario communities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are performed, for instance.<sup>82</sup> Instead, antique car shows are held on the grounds of historic villages as at Doon Heritage Crossroads, children perform traditional fertility dances around a maypole outside the 1850s Joseph Schneider Mennonite farmhouse,<sup>83</sup> and the Battle of Gettysburgh is re-enacted at the Pickering Museum Village.

Sites also capitalize on contemporary religious and secular holidays for staging events. Several museums have Easter egg hunts, teddy bear's picnics and haunted Halloween parties for children. Mother's and Father's day celebrations feature crafts and exhibits of bonnets for mothers and military re-enactments and displays of horse-drawn vehicles for dads.<sup>84</sup> The most popular theme for all special events is again "pioneer" or "founder's" days (70 pioneer day events held across 88 museums), followed by Victorian or pioneer Christmas (57 events at 88 sites). Victorian Christmas celebrations, as they have been perpetuated, seem most authentic to North Americans and museums find these festivities popular at a time of year when ritual and nostalgia are already in full force. Christmas exhibits with titles such as "A Handmade Christmas," "Christmas in the Village," or "A Dickens of a Christmas," run for over a month at most sites. Against a background of pioneer hominess or wealthy Victorian interiors filled with swags, ribbons, decorated trees and exhibits of turn-of-the-century toys, visitors can drink mulled cider, eat gingerbread, participate in carol-singing, and fulfil their needs to balance the barren secularization of modern Christmas. Strawberry socials, garden parties and social teas are favoured summertime events, and Thanksgiving or harvest festivals populate the fall season.

Special events connect the local past and present much more candidly than exhibits at community history museums in Ontario. Instead of re-interpreting donated objects in a passive narrative or animated rhetoric of the past, at special events the historical interests and leisure needs of the present are matched with a range of local resources, to reproduce those aspects of the past which are most attractive to the

**Fig. 6**  
*Teddy bear race at "Teddy Bear's Picnic," McCrae House, Guelph, July, 1992. (Courtesy Guelph Tribune)*



tourist. Tradition and culture in the form of public performance, not curated history, predominate here, through crafts, music, food, and dance. Like museums, special events can be viewed as rituals of nativism and cultural regeneration, underlined by a shared understanding of what is culturally appropriate and authentic.<sup>85</sup> This is heritage in praxis. Like most folk festivals, it appears to be also, in Dean MacCannell's sense of the word, undeniably antimodern. Perhaps this unabashed, decontextualized collage of ersatz history, folk performance and re-invented traditions is evidence of an ongoing need to create a social and cultural community identity. The pioneer remains stalwart throughout these activities, but with a new and curious companion.

### Global Pioneers

Modern pioneers in the form of local multicultural groups have also taken up residence in Ontario's community history museums. Through exhibits in museums of the history and traditions of these groups, they become "traditionalized, valorized and legitimized"<sup>86</sup> as part of the community. Concerning an exhibition at the Strathroy-Middlesex Museum on the local Portuguese experience, the curator wrote:

*The museum made a number of new friends, volunteers and supporters and developed as an institution. This was the first time a contemporary cultural group had been discussed in an exhibitionary format. It was an important departure from weaving and butter-making.*<sup>87</sup>

Perhaps, with a new generation of curators, and a new social gospel, the pioneer myth in Ontario's community museums is finally being replaced with one more compelling; that of a multicultural society in a global village.<sup>88</sup> This concept still has much to do with fear of loss of identity, but in this new myth the distinctiveness and values of the local past are secondary to the cultural fabric and relativity of the present. Embracing multicultural exhibits in which various local ethnic groups present themselves, where the historical storyline is ancillary to contemporary discussions of cultural tradition and expression, is very popular in these museums at present, perhaps more than the mounting of social history exhibits.<sup>89</sup> Multicultural displays tend to express a celebratory flavour, cultural conflict is minimized in the outline of how these groups have contributed to the community.<sup>90</sup> Aided by provincial monies under a "History of Ontario's

Peoples" programme that emphasizes community multiculturalism, the community history museum in Ontario is able to expand its civic responsibilities into explaining the recent past in a mode of pluralist optimism for the benefit of the community's present and future. Hopefully, as the curator above noted, this work will also expand the museum's audience.

### Reflecting and Affecting

There is evidence that attendance at community history museums is down.<sup>91</sup> Questions about the attraction of museums, the potency of objects and narratives, in a postmodern, electronic world have been debated in recent museum publications and conferences.<sup>92</sup> Some discussions have tried to delineate the differences between missions and methods of museums and the secular goals of the museum's more popular alter ego, the theme park. These exchanges have argued for the application of theme park methods to museum missions in order to keep the museum a relevant, popular social institution.<sup>93</sup> If in a postmodern pluralist society a museum visitor sees that a "stuffed tiger is a stuffed tiger"<sup>94</sup> and no more, if spinning wheels lose their semiotic powers as signs of simplicity, honesty and hardwork, if we are indeed "amusing ourselves to death,"<sup>95</sup> what is the future attraction of the typographically based, object centred, didactic community history museum?

The canonical debate in museology which pitches the temple against the forum seems appropriate here.<sup>96</sup> With the ambivalence of the author of that article who sees the temple within the forum, this one suggests that there is a place for all these expressions of past and present in the community museum, with apologies to no one. Here, in the ever-expanding definition of heritage, perhaps the community museum can be equally elastic, and reveal itself in its true colours – a civic convention, diagnostic of the local cultural fabric in a myriad of forms, rather than a purely historical institution. Considering the community history museum's pioneer legacy, civic obligations, competing functions, diverse clientele and limited resources, perhaps we should accept that the museum will collect not only history, it may also serve to celebrate the local community in ways that meet its psychic needs. As a tourist to Black Creek Pioneer Village penned in their visitor's book: "Thank you for the realism [sic] and the daydreams of what the world should be like."<sup>97</sup>

## NOTES

1. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist, A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 1.
2. In much of the literature concerning historic preservation and heritage conservation the "past" is the considered subject of study. Underdefined, this "past" appears to be distinguished from "history" as a field, rather than an approach to study.
3. In *The Tourist*, Dean MacCannell argues that the search for authenticity is a prime goal of tourist activity. Authenticity, according to MacCannell, is judged by tourists as that which is, in his terms, premodern. Brook Hindle maintains that the need to touch reality gives the historical museum an "abiding purpose." Brook Hindle, "How Much is a Piece of the True Cross Worth?" in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, ed. Ian Quimby (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 6.
4. David Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985) is the classic study of nostalgia, history and the re-creation of the past in Europe and North America. Lowenthal titled his book after L. P. Hartley's quote in *The Go-Between*, "The Past is a foreign country, they do things differently there." See Lowenthal, xvi.
5. For the purpose of this paper, community history museum is defined according to the definition of community museum in Ontario Regulation 417/84, under the Ontario Heritage Act, as a non-profit institution, "established for the purpose of acquiring, conserving, studying, interpreting, assembling and exhibiting to the public for its instruction and enjoyment a collection of artifacts of historical interest." There are over 400 history museums in the province of Ontario. Of these, at least 200 receive direct operating support from the provincial Ministry of Culture and Communications, on the basis of meeting the definition of a qualifying museum in the provincial regulations, and having achieved certain basic standards of operation. These institutions, which participate in the Province's "Community Museum Operating Grant" (CMOG) programme, form the body of museums under study here. They tend to be larger and better-supported than community museums which do not qualify to participate in this program. Several large and popular history museums in the province such as Upper Canada Village are not clients of the Community Museums Operating Programme, because their operations are almost entirely funded and managed by other provincial ministries or federal departments. This study did not include local military museums, or museums whose primary focus is specialized collections rather than local history. The actual number of sites analysed varied with available documents; approximately 172 sites were examined for operating costs, staffing and volunteer data, 157 for statements of purpose and other policy documents, 104 for information on exhibits and special events, and 93 for promotional materials.
6. See Archie F. Key, *Beyond Four Walls: The Origin and Development of Canadian Museums* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973). Michael Ettema in "History Museums and the Cult of Materialism" in Warren Leon and Jo Blatti, eds. *Past Meets Present: Essays About Historical Interpretation and Public Audiences* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 62-85, notes the influence of escapist nostalgia in interior decorating, fashion, and the resurgence of craft industries.
7. These attentions have been spawned in the academy through growing interests in the use of material culture in historical research, and in the growth in the fields of cultural and public history that consider the development, role, operation and meaning of institutions that maintain and produce historical information. A host of recent American and British books include Thomas J. Schlereth's *Cultural History and Material Culture* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990) and his *Artifacts and the American Past* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1980); Gaynor Kavanagh, *History Curatorship* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990); Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds. *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Leon and Blatti, *Past Meets Present*; Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1991); and Robert Lumley, *The Museum Time Machine* (London, 1988).
8. On Tourist motivations see Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist*; Donald Horne, *The Great Museum: The Re-presentation of History* (London: Pluto Press, 1984); Philip L. Pearce, *The Social Psychology of Tourist Behaviour* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982); Jean-Didier Urbain, "The Tourist Adventure and His Images," *Annals of Tourism Research* 16:1, 106-118; and V. A. Konrad "Historical Artifacts as Recreational Resources" in *Recreational Land Use: Perspectives on its Evolution in Canada*, ed. G. Wall and J. Marsh (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1982), 393-416. On the motivations of historical societies and museum founding organizations in Canada see Gerald Killan *Preserving Ontario's Heritage* (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1976); Ian Kerr-Wilson, "Historical Societies and their Museums: A Survey of the Ontario Case" (Master's Thesis, University of Toronto,

- 1987); and Mary Tivy, "From Memory to History: Re-Creating the Past at Doon Pioneer Village" (Unpublished research paper, 1990). The social act of collecting and signifying with objects is discussed by a range of academics in addition to Lowenthal and MacCannell. Susan Stewart's powerful study of collecting and nostalgia, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) examines how meaning is produced through the process of museum classification and display. Similar themes are explored in a vast number of other publications including Jeanne Cannizzo, "Negotiated Realities: Towards an Ethnography of Museums" in *Living in a Material World*, ed. Gerald L. Pocius (St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1991), 19–30; John Dorst, *The Written Suburb* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1989); Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986); Jean Beaudrillard, *The Mirror of Production* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975); George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1962); Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Charles Saumarez Smith, "Museums, Artefacts and Meanings" in *The New Museology*, ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 6–21; George W. Stocking, ed., *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).
9. Many museums are in fact, located in these now obsolete institutions – small schools that have been replaced through busing and consolidation, town halls that have lost their function, abandoned post offices and so on.
  10. "Pioneer museums" was the popular term used for community museums in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.
  11. Along with other aspects of the heritage movement, fear and nostalgia combined to produce a potent force for museum creation. Ann Faulkner in the preface to *Without Our Past?: A Handbook for the Preservation of Canada's Architectural Heritage* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977) cites fear of the loss of architectural local character as the basis for her work.
  12. Cited in a special anniversary newsletter of the Jordan Historical Museum, "The 20th of the Twenty: Jordan Historical Museum of the Twenty 1953–1973." Public Archives of Ontario, RG 47, Ontario Historical Society Records, Alice Davidson Scrapbook Number 7, MU 4446.
  13. As a result, community museums in Ontario included school houses and steam locomotives in their collections, horse-drawn hearses, furniture, costume, domestic and agricultural utensils and equipment and so on. Only one museum of over 150 examined included the study of local oral tradition in their statement of purpose. The Jordan Historical Museum Statement of Purpose includes "To preserve the oral tradition of the past." (Community Museums Unit, Policy Files, MCC). With the exception of work conducted by a few individuals in the province, this collecting, then, did not include the immaterial – language, song, dance, and other customs less directly evidenced by material goods.
  14. Pioneers in Ontario museums are discussed in Joanne Lea's "Defining Terms: The Pioneers and Other Myths," *Museum Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (February 1990): 25–35. David Lowenthal considers the myth of the pioneer in American history museums in "Pioneer Museums" in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 115–127.
  15. Royce MacGillivray identifies the pioneer myth as the most powerful myth in Ontario, and especially influential in local history writing in "Local History as a Form of Popular Culture in Ontario," *New York History* 15, no. 4 (October 1984): 371. See also his *The Slopes of the Andes: Four Essays on the Rural Myth on Ontario* (Belleville: Mika Publishing, 1990).
  16. Dr Louis Blake Duff, as reported in "Need Museums, Historian Says," *Globe and Mail*, Friday 21 May 1954. Clipping in Public Archives of Ontario, RG 47, Ontario Historical Society Records, Alice Davidson Scrapbook Number 1, 1954–1956, MU 5443, Box 23a.
  17. Blodwen Davis, "History at the Grass Roots." Ontario Historical Society Records, Davidson Scrapbook Number 1.
  18. *Ibid.*
  19. *Ibid.*
  20. "Need Museums, Historian Says," *Globe and Mail*.
  21. These figures are based on listings in the *Directory of Canadian Museums and Related Institutions* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum Association, 1990); *Museums and Art Galleries 1951–1952* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1955); and Lee Jolliffe, "Municipal Museums in Canada: Contemporary Directions." (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Leicester, 1987). The Province of Ontario provided operating grants to five community museums in 1953 amounting to \$3000. By 1989, 200 museums received \$3 143 508 in operating support from the Ministry of Culture and Communication (hereafter MCC). That same year these museums received approximately \$23 550 000 in direct operating support from municipal and provincial governments. Of this funding, 86 per cent is from municipal governments. These figures do not include capital funds or

- monies granted for special projects. For most institutions, less than 20 per cent of funds are earned revenue. Data from "Selected Information on Community Museums in Ontario," Unpublished report, Ontario Museum Association, 1990.
22. Some museums' statements of purpose do acknowledge the symbolic role of the museum in community identification, such as the Bancroft Museum: "House and preserve artifacts which reflect the nature and character of our area and people, and articles which are of special significance to the people ... to make it possible for people to find in our exhibits, articles with which they can identify as a member of a family and part of a community as a whole, and through this to gain some feeling for the community's past." Community Museums Policy Files, MCC.
  23. A. C. Parker, *A Manual for History Museums* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1966), 15. He illustrated the civic responsibility of the museum with the description of an exhibit called "The Shrine of the Citizen," which outlined the citizen's obligations and rights. Moved by the message of their democratic inheritance, men took off their hats and women knelt in prayer in front of this display. *Ibid.*, 65. While this behaviour might be attributed to American zeal to the ideals of democracy, in Canada, nationalism has been credited for the federal preservation of military structures, the development of museums in the Niagara region during the 1890s debates on imperialism, and for the formation of several historical societies. See C. J. Taylor, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada's National Historic Parks and Sites* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), as well as Killan, *Preserving Ontario's Heritage* and Ian Kerr-Wilson, "Historical Societies."
  24. Carl E. Guthe, "The Museum as a Social Instrument." Reprinted in *Ontario History* 8, no. 3 (1961): 171.
  25. *Ibid.*
  26. Pauline Hall, *Display: The Vehicle for the Museum's Message* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Public Records and Archives, 1969), 12.
  27. Erland Lee Museum, Community Museums Policy Files, MCC.
  28. Lynne Kurylo, "Grime, Crime and Slime: Museum Stories and Their Limits," *Museum Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (November 1990): 3.
  29. Narratives implicitly have moral meaning according to cultural historian Hayden White's analysis of narrative construction in historical writing. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).
  30. Examples of such statements of purpose include that of Black Creek Pioneer Village: "Created as a living folk museum for the purpose of preserving for present and future generations the contributions made by the early settlers to south-central Ontario which have influenced our way of life and are an important part of Canadian heritage. The village illustrates ... the progression in south-central Ontario from the early agricultural settler to permanently established rural villager of 1867 ...." Community Museum Policy Files, MCC.
  31. Of 157 statements of purpose, 75 have a clause that refers to providing a community service or conducting the museum for the "betterment" of the community.
  32. A nativistic movement is defined by Ralph Linton as, "any conscious, organized attempt on the part of a society's members to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of its culture." Linton, "Nativistic Movements," *American Anthropologist* 45 (1943): 230. Pierre Bourdieu looks at cultural belief transmitted in museums as a form of class hegemony in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
  33. At the official opening of the Jordan Historical Museum for instance, fifteen direct descendants of the original settlers were presented to the Lieutenant-Governor, Davidson Scrapbook Number 1, *ibid.* The North Marysburgh Museum has a policy to "Hire residents of North Marysburgh Township who are interested in the history of the area and are descendants of the oldest families, if possible." Community Museums Policy Files, MCC. See Tivy, "From Memory to History" for a discussion of the role of descendants of settlers in the formation of Doon Pioneer Village.
  34. Alan Dundes, "The Functions of Folklore" in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 277. William Bascom, "The Four Functions of Folklore" in *The Study of Folklore*, 279-291.
  35. Industrial museums in Ontario include the Hamilton Museum of Steam and Technology, whose recently revised mission statement includes interpreting the impact of the waterworks on the "industrial and social growth of Hamilton." Community Museums Policy Files, MCC. Popular in France and Quebec, ecomuseums are centred on a broad definition of local cultural heritage and tradition as opposed to local history. These museums, such as L'Écomusée de la Haute-Beauce, are identified as a territory rather than a building, and advocate for the identification and protection of local heritage in many forms - landscape, dialect, traditional occupations, and so on. Although apparently antimodernist, they also serve to mediate social change in the community.
  36. Exceptions to this rule can be found at the Muskoka Lakes Museum where the prerequi-

- site log cabin was built and owned by a settler who quickly went bankrupt and left the area. Although it was never installed, the curator of the Norwich Museum planned an exhibit examining the decline and questionable future of the township in which it is located. Described in a paper prepared by Scott Gillies for the "Exhibit Design" course offered by the Ontario Museum Association, 1984. Community Museums Policy Files, MCC. The Peterborough Centennial Museum has a small display on tenant housing construction, ca 1900.
37. Now politically outdated, "Indian" is still the term most frequently used in community history museums, rather than Native Peoples or First Nations.
  38. These and other descriptions are based on the frequency of their appearance in statements of purpose of 157 museums and in the exhibit descriptions of 104 museums for the 1989–90 period.
  39. These traits appear as key concepts in statements of purpose, exhibit labels and programme interpretation. For instance at Lang Pioneer Village a large label states "Lang Pioneer Village is a living monument to the past faith, endurance and ingenuity of the pioneers ..."
  40. Determined from images on brochures, descriptions of school programmes, and interpreter's roles.
  41. The main objective of the 1820 Allan Macpherson House (Napane) is to "preserve a Georgian-style mansion of the 1820–40 period and to portray the lifestyle of the wealthy owners of that period." Allan Macpherson House Education and Interpretation Policy, Community Museums Policy files, MCC. The Inverarden Regency Cottage (Cornwall) has been preserved to "show all residents of Ontario the grand way of life pursued by an important segment of Upper Canada's first European inhabitants." Inverarden Regency Cottage Statement of Purpose, Community Museums Policy files, MCC. This museum's 1989 brochure describes it as the finest remaining example of Regency cottage architecture in Ontario. "Characterized by strength, austerity, purity and order, Inverarden reflects the best in Regency architecture and the man who built it."
  42. The "pioneering" period varies with each community, but is consistently identified with the attributes discussed here.
  43. Producer-ethic is discussed by Jean-Christophe Agnew in "Coming Up for Air: Consumer Culture in Historical Perspective," *Intellectual History Newsletter* 12 (1990): 5.
  44. Most local history museums have large collections of handworked decorative textiles from the late nineteenth century including tablecloths, piano scarves, doilies, etc. These appear in room settings or special exhibits such as the Elgin County Pioneer Museum's 1989 display "Tatted Remembrances." Community Museum File HER-90-120-050.
  45. Almost every local history museum, bestowed with late Victorian sitting room or parlour furniture during the intense collecting of the 1960s and 1970s, has displayed these pieces in a parlour setting. Unfortunately these settings do not carry the quality of interpretation such as that provided by Ken Ames in "Meanings in Artifacts: Hall Furnishings in Victorian America" in *Material Culture Studies in America*, 206–221.
  46. Special exhibits on gadgets were featured in 1989 at the Arnprior Museum, Black Creek Pioneer Village and Champlain Trail Museum. Community Museum Files, MCC, HER-90-120-003, HER-90-120-016, HER-90-120-031.
  47. After Christmas, the most popular theme for special exhibits in the 1989–90 period at the museums examined was costume.
  48. As David Richeson noted in his essay "Museum Collections – Distortions of Our Past?" *Museum Quarterly* (1983): 18–22, most local history museums contain numerous ceremonial items, which no longer have a function outside of the museum. Christening gowns, wedding dresses and mourning clothes are in abundance in museums, while work wear is largely absent. The abundance of funerary material including mourning clothes, jewellery, and horse drawn hearses supported the production of a 1989 travelling exhibit by the Clarke Museum and Archives "In Repose: Victorian Mourning Customs," which was displayed at several local history museums in the province.
  49. With the exception, of course, of museums such as the Woodland Cultural Centre run by First Nations groups, which deal with contemporary Native cultural and social life. Since this research was conducted some museums, notably the Peterborough Centennial Museum and Archives, have produced exhibits that look at contemporary social and political issues connected with local groups of First Nations peoples. That Museum's "Time of Healing – Time of Change" exhibit (May 24–July 12, 1992), discussed the current challenges facing First Nations in the locality, and placed these in an historical context.
  50. For a discussion of the images of First Nations in Ontario museums see Mary Tivy, "Salvaging the Authentic: The Idea of the Indian in Ontario's Museums," paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Ontario Museum Association, Kitchener, Ontario, 27 October 1991.
  51. At least ten of the gallery history museums surveyed have streetscape or storefront galleries, most of which depict the period 1880–1920. Among others see the Brant County Museum, Huron County Museum, and Simcoe County Museum.

52. Age and size are still criteria in community museum collecting policies. Many local history museums do not collect within a 50-year hiatus, and of those with policies that permit collecting to the present, very few have contemporary materials. In interviews conducted in 1987 of ten curators of museums with collecting policies to the present, not one included a television set in their collections. See Tivy, "The Quality of Research."
53. Such as the Ontario Museum Certificate in Museum Studies programme developed in 1979–80, the University of Toronto Master of Museum Studies programme introduced in 1972 and the Algonquin College programme in Museum Technology.
54. This shift is documented by Jolliffe in "Municipal Museums in Canada: Contemporary Directions." In an interesting parallel the creation of the Ontario Museum Association, an offspring of the Ontario Historical Society Museums Section was prompted largely because the problems of museum operation were seen to be outside of the disciplinary limits of the Ontario Historical Society, and the members of the museum section wanted to involve museum workers from various types of museums, beyond those that had membership in the Ontario Historical Society.
55. On these standards see in *Museum Quarterly* (Fall 1984), Marty Brent, "The Standards for Community Museums in Ontario," 7–8; Lynne Kurylo, "The Ministry of Citizenship and Culture's Standards," 9–13; and Elmer Pilon, "Striving for Excellence," 14–16.
56. Publications on the interpretation of social history in Ontario's community museums include Carl Benn, "Living History Lies and Social History," *Museum Quarterly* 16, no. 2, (Summer 1987): 3, 28; Chris Miller-Marti, "Local History Museums and the Creation of the Past," *MUSE* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 36–39; and Kurylo, "Grime, Crime and Slime." The Masters of Museum Studies Programme at the University of Toronto holds several unpublished student research papers on the interpretation of history in Ontario's museums. See for instance, John Pinkerton, "Canadian Living History: Tradition or Revision" (1990) and Manda Vranik, "An Exploration into Gender Roles and Family Patterns at Three Ontario Living-History Sites" (1990). The Masters of Public History Programme at the University of Waterloo also has student papers on Canadian museums, such as Ann Martin's study of the development of Upper Canada Village, "Loyal She Began ...: The Beginnings of Upper Canada Village," (1989).
57. See for instance, Thomas J. Schlereth, ed., *Material Culture Studies in America* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982), and his *Material Culture: A Research Guide* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985); Gregg Finley, "Material History and Curatorship: Problems and Prospects," *Muse* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 1985): 36–39 and his "Material History and Museums: A Curatorial Perspective in Doctoral Research," *Material History Bulletin* 20 (Fall 1984): 75–79; Robert D. Turner, "The Limitations of Material History: A Museological Perspective," *Material History Bulletin* 20 (Autumn 1984): 87–92; Michael J. Ettema, "History Museums and the Cult of Materialism." See also Barbara G. Carson and Cary Carson, "Things Unspoken: Learning Social History from Artifacts," in *Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History*, ed. James B. Gardner and Rollie B. Adams (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1983).
58. Doon Heritage Crossroads is no longer using this interpretive technique.
59. Telephone interview with curator, 8 October 1987. Although special non-capital grants are available from the province for a variety of purposes (upgrading of equipment, special events, museum training, and so on), there are no grants available to conduct research per se. In fact, curators do not have the opportunity either to research or publish to any great degree. No community museum curators have published in the last ten years of *Canadian Historical Review* for instance, and only two have contributed to Ontario History. See Mary Tivy, "The Quality of Research is Definitely Strained: Collections Research in Ontario Community Museums," *Material History Bulletin* 27 (Spring 1987): 61–68.
60. Discussion with Curator of Education at Halton Regional Museum, 15 October 1991. A World War II German prisoner-of-war camp near Bowmanville was the theme of an exhibit at the Bowmanville Museum, and the subject of contention when former inmates convening at the museum for a reunion disagreed with the museum's interpretation of the camp. Telephone interview with curator, 14 November 1991.
61. Few studies have actually attempted to evaluate visitor perceptions of the past on entry or exit to history museums, or their response to social historical interpretive approaches. Most visitor studies are quantitative, and look to identifying user (or non-user) group needs by demographic criteria. That people prefer historic environments such as historic villages or historic houses is confirmed in a number of studies, such as Nick Merriman's "The Social Basis of Museum and Heritage Visiting," *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, ed. Susan Pearce (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988), 153–171, which found that people interviewed in a British study on museum visiting preferred historic site visits to gallery museum visits and ranked the former as their favourite way of finding out about the past (movies were not an

- option on this scale, but television was). Visiting a gallery museum ranked second last, on par with going to a library and above going to evening classes. See also B. Dixon, A. Courtney and R. Bailey, *The Museum and the Canadian Public* (Ottawa: Secretary of State, 1974).
62. Leon and Piatt, "Living History Museums" in *History Museums in the United States*, 78.
  63. Telephone interview with curator, 23 January 1992.
  64. Interview with curator, 16 October 1991.
  65. Interview with Tom Reitz, 12 March 1992.
  66. Pinkerton, "Canadian Living History," 101.
  67. That community museums need to be more entrepreneurial to garner community support if they are to survive was the argument that both the president of the Ontario Association of Municipalities and the president of the Ontario Museum Association presented to the delegates at the 1989 annual conference of the Ontario Museum Association. From 1987 to 1989 the greatest increase in operating expenditure categories in community museums in Ontario that receive operating funds from the Ministry of Culture and Communications was in promotions and marketing, which showed an operating expenditure increase from 1.3 per cent to 5.1 per cent. Reported in Ken Doherty, "Through the Funnel: Where Our Money Comes and Goes," *Currently* 15, no. 4 (Aug.–Sept. 1992): 6.
  68. Fanshawe Pioneer Village 1992 brochure.
  69. Muskoka Pioneer Village brochure, ca 1990.
  70. Champlain Trail Museum brochure, ca 1989.
  71. Fort Erie Historical and Railroad Museum brochure, ca 1989.
  72. Lang Pioneer Village brochure ca 1990.
  73. Joseph Schneider Haus brochure, ca 1989.
  74. Using both the elements of contrast with the modern present and authenticity of a pioneer past, the Bradley Museum 1991 brochure states, "In the midst of an active and expanding city sits a fragment of the early nineteenth century. The Bradley Museum recreates a simpler life when families worked together to farm the land, and gathered around the hearth to eat their fare."
  75. The Huronia Museum brochure (ca 1989) described the Huron, among other less invective images, as "unspeakably cruel." The Joseph Brant Museum brochure assures us that although "Regarded by European fur traders as barbarians of the forest (les sauvages), Woodland Indians had, in fact, developed a highly complex democratic culture." (ca 1989).
  76. See note 49.
  77. The success and production of this exhibit are described by the museum curator: Pat Zimmer, "For Your Eyes Only," *Museum Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (November 1989): 41–43.
  78. Community Museums File HER-90-120-016, MCC.
  79. Community Museums File HER-90-120-031, MCC.
  80. Community Museums File HER-90-120-011, MCC.
  81. Dixon, Courtney and Bailey, *The Museum and the Canadian Public*, p. 162, cite "learning something" as a motivation for museum visiting in 82 per cent of those interviewed.
  82. Pointed out by John Pinkerton, 101.
  83. The Joseph Schneider Haus Museum does incorporate several special events that are appropriate to the site such as "Fleece to Fabric Frolic," "A Schnitzing Bee," and "A Butchering Bee," etc. Community Museum file HER-90-120-093, MCC.
  84. For instance, The Bradley House Museum engaged a wheelwright for Father's Day, 1990, and conducted a military re-enactment on Father's Day, 1989. Lang Pioneer Village features a black powder rendezvous for Father's Day, 1989.
  85. Halpin describes this process at the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia in "Quality and the Post-Modern Museum." Ivan Karp calls festivals "totalizing participation," and quotes folklorist Richard Bauman's description of these as a "blowout." Ivan Karp, "Festivals" in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, 282.
  86. These are the terms Richard Bauman and Patricia Sawin use in their analysis of the inclusion of vernacular and ethnic groups in folklife festivals. See "The Politics of Participation in Folklife Festivals" in *Exhibiting Cultures*, p. 289.
  87. Laurence Grant, "Cultural Pluralism in Three Ontario Community Museums," *MUSE* 9, no. 3 (Winter 1992): 56.
  88. See George MacDonald, "The Future of Museums in the Global Village," *Museum* 155 (1987): 209–216.
  89. These exhibits have been supported by grants made available from the Ontario Historical Society and Ontario Multicultural History Society through a programme called "The History of Ontario's Peoples" designed to "promote a greater awareness of the history of the many peoples of Ontario ... to create a greater understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultures of Ontario." Programme application forms, Ontario Historical Society, 1988.
  90. Presenting an exhibit on an ethnic group that has fundamental internal political divisions was a challenge for the curator of the Welland Historical Museum's "Matters Close to the Heart: The Ukrainian Experience in Welland" exhibit. The curator labelled this a show about "folklife and community experience. We provided the opportunity for the people to tell their own stories and we used their words as an integral part of the exhibition. Welland Historical Museum Newsletter, 6, no. 2: 3.



91. Tom Reitz, "Trends in Living History, Museums, Heritage Organizations," Paper presented at the Ontario Museum Association Conference, Niagara-on-the-Lake, 20 October 1990.
92. Marjorie Halpin, "Quality and the Post-Modern Museum." Paper presented at the Canadian Museum Associations Trainers' Workshop, *Delivering Quality Training*, Ottawa, August 1987. Robert Kelly "The Crisis in the Arts: With Special Reference to Museums." Paper presented at the International Council of Museums, Barcelona, June, 1991.
93. "Museum World 1991: A Themepark of Ideas for the 1990s" was the theme of the 1991 Ontario Museum Association Conference, October 24-27, Kitchener, Ontario. Sessions included "Ideas from Theme Parks" and "Do Museum Interpreters and Mickey Mouse Have Anything in Common?"
94. Halpin, 15.
95. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Viking, 1985) maintains that Western society expects to be entertained as part of the learning process.
96. Duncan Cameron, "The Museum, Temple or Forum," *Curator* XIV, no. 1 (1971): 11-24.
97. "For Your Information," *Staff Newsletter*, Black Creek Pioneer Village, May 1989. Community Museums File HER-90-120-016.