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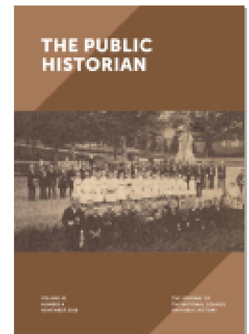

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Hippies Living History

Form and Context in Tracing Public History's Past

Malgorzata J. Rymsza-Pawlowska

ABSTRACT: In the late 1960s and 1970s, living history flowered, with new developments in research and interpretation at sites like Plimoth Plantation and Old Sturbridge Village, and the establishment of many new living history farms and museums, alongside a new professional organization: the Association for Living History Farms and Museums. This article examines this shift and puts it into conversation with the concurrent countercultural and commune movement, which often resembled—both aesthetically and ideologically—new living history. Using this case study as a model, I argue that in order to fully understand and account for developments in public practice, we must not only look at public history in a wider lens, but also account for form alongside context.

KEY WORDS: living history, communes, counterculture, hippies, Plimoth Plantation, historiography

In his ethnographic study of the living history museum Plimoth Plantation, Stephen Eddy Snow, who in the 1980s spent fifteen months as a participant-observer at the site, quotes from an anecdote about a 1970 visit by a delegation of *Mayflower* descendants told to him by a longtime employee. Walking around, the group saw interpreters portraying the role of 1620s colonists. They were farming, cooking, and working with animals. Their clothes were dirty, their hair unkempt, and many were barefoot, laughing and joking with each other as they went about their daily chores. In other words, they did not resemble what we tend to think Pilgrims looked and acted like: clean, austere, peaceful. Snow's informant described the outrage of the visitors, who exclaimed "its full of hippies!" and bemoaned the loss of "nice ladies in neat costumes"—referring to the mostly local women who had worked at the site through the 1950s and 1960s.[1] But these "hippies" were also practitioners of a new form of historical research and interpretation. By the 1970s, in fact, Plimoth

1 Stephen Eddy Snow, *Performing the Pilgrims: A Study of Ethnohistorical Role-Playing at Plimoth Plantation* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 37.

THE PUBLIC HISTORIAN, Vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 36–55 (November 2019). ISSN: 0272-3433, electronic ISSN 1533-8576. © 2019 by The Regents of the University of California and the National Council on Public History. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2019.41.4.36.

Plantation and its assistant director, James Deetz, were lauded as the vanguard of the rapidly developing field of living history. The work they were doing was bringing new insight into cultural understandings of everyday life in early America.[2]

These visitors were so accustomed to—and invested in—a particular vision of Plimoth's past, that that they could only make sense of this display by resorting to the use of a contemporary trope. By 1970, it would have been easy to characterize Plimoth's new hires as "hippies"—the most visible symptom of the counterculture. Although commentators—both then and now—have struggled to find consensus over the exact contours of this cultural and social phenomenon, they mostly agree on its signifiers, as inventoried by Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle: "an inherently unstable collection of attitudes, tendencies, postures, gestures, 'lifestyles,' ideals, visions, hedonistic pleasures, moralisms, negations, and affirmations."[3] Both then and now, "hippie" became the identifier most easily thrown at many different kinds of young, disheveled people.[4]

And yet, is it possible that there's something more to this moment of misrecognition? Were the visitors bemoaning the generation gap, or were they actually picking up on some underlying relationship between this new practice of living history, on the one hand, and the counterculture, on the other? Perhaps the living history practitioners were *also* hippies after all. To put this another way, what would it mean to take seriously the commonalities between the ethos and experiences of two contemporaneous movements: the expansion of the counterculture and new developments in living history?

In beginning to answer this question and others as well, I will take a close look at the expansion, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, of living history museums and farms, placing this alongside the history of the counterculture and the commune movement. The two developments emerged nearly simultaneously, and had overlapping ideological concerns and practical approaches: that is, as we see from the anecdote above, they often looked and felt similar. Furthermore, many living history practitioners held many of the same interests and beliefs and even shared approaches and resources for their practices with some members of the counterculture. In order to fully describe and evaluate this relationship, I will pay close attention to living history at this moment as a specific *form*, and examine how this relates to the counterculture.

2 Jay Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1984), 17–84.

3 Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s* (New York: Routledge 2002), 10. For more efforts at definition, see Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Doug Rossinow, "The New Left in the Counterculture: Hypotheses and Evidence," *Radical History Review* 67 (Winter 1997): 79–120; Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, second ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011 ([1991]).

4 See also Tim Hogdon, *Manhood In the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities, 1965–83*, second edition, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

This article has two distinct but interlocking goals; first, to fill in a missing but important piece in the history of living history. And as importantly, to experiment with and advocate for a wider lens for historical inquiry: I wish to take seriously the relationship that public history has with its broader contexts by examining a case study in which this relationship is remarkably close. In doing so, I also want to think about this question of causality: if such a relationship exists, in what direction should we draw the links that bind these two phenomena together? Was the counterculture merely an influence on the development of living history, or was there a more complex relationship between the two? I will use this set of questions to underscore the importance of considering form in the study of public history and its cultural contexts.

Academic and public historians have long been dealing with the "objectivity question," borne out of the myths of empiricism and social science, which views the work that we do as providing information about the past as it "really was." But, of course, we know that is not the case: interpretation of the past—*whose* stories are told, *which* ones, and *why*—changes with social, political, and economic contexts.[5] This issue of perspective or narrative is critical, and has in recent years become more central to the conversations around history—partly *because* of work done by public historians (many during the "culture wars" of the 1990s, when questions of interpretation became increasingly politicized) who have helped bring to the foreground questions about how it is that the public perceives the past.[6] Public historians have also been doing important scholarship on institutional history: looking at the dynamics at play behind the work of public history and the audiences in front of it, and how these, in turn, influence the narratives and interpretations that are presented at museums and historical sites.

But there is still a missing piece—particularly in public and popular facing history—because when we think about how contexts influence interpretation, we also need to think about how presentation changes as well: in other words, form alongside content. Like content and context (which histories are being conveyed and how they are framed), form (how this is done), is inextricable from the various social, political, and cultural factors that surround it. So, when we see shifts in the kinds of histories that are being highlighted ("history from below," for example), they are often accompanied by changes in how the interpretation is presented (artifacts in a museum are replaced by images and media). It is worth

5 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). See also Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

6 Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991); John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

thinking about *why* this happens and *how*, and to work through strategies to analyze or examine these shifts.

Living history, I would argue, is a good site at which to test out some of these questions precisely because as a form it is unlike any other. It puts forth not information, but impressions. Meaning is made on the individual, not collective level. Scholars working across a number of fields have written about living history museums and the way that they make historical meaning. In the 1980s, as part of a turn that interrogated theatricality in everyday life and put pressure on the question of performativity broadly defined, performance studies scholars, including Stephen Eddy Snow and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett became interested in the way that living history helped make historical meaning through reenactment.[7] Subsequent work by Scott Magellssen, Rebecca Schneider, and others has continued this line of inquiry, giving us one way to start thinking about issues of form.[8] Other scholars of living history museums have focused on founders and management—most prominently, Mike Wallace's 1981 article (later, book chapter) on the industrialists who founded Williamsburg and Henry Ford's Greenfield Village, and—from another angle—anthropologists Richard Handler and Eric Gable's 1997 study of Colonial Williamsburg.[9] These studies offer the opposite challenge; they provide good context—that is, arguments about how these sites were a product of a particular moment (the beginning and end of the Colonial Revival) and advanced particular visions of the past (nationalistic, idyllic)—but pay too little attention to form. As Cary Carson of Colonial Williamsburg wrote of Handler and Gable's work at the time, approaches like this overemphasize ideology and miss the interesting things that happen in everyday interactions across and inside the museum.[10]

This critical omission has been addressed and developed through important work by Alison Landsberg and Amy Tyson, both historians who investigate affect—the emotional labor done by audiences on one hand, and interpreters on the other.[11] Through their careful and insightful studies, Tyson and Landsberg have shown the ways that, when done through and by the body, interpretations can be

7 Snow, *Performing the Pilgrims*; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

8 Scott Magelssen, *Living History Museums: Undoing History Through Performance* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007); Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

9 Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," *Radical History Review* 1, no. 25 (January 1981): 63–96; Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 3–32.

10 Cary Carson, "Lost in the Fun House: A Commentary on Anthropologists' First Contact with History Museums," *Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (June, 1994): 137–50.

11 Amy Tyson, *The Wages of History: Emotional Labor on Public History's Front Lines* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013); Alison Landsberg, *Engaging the Past: Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

variable and capricious: the body is the site at which personal and historical experiences converge. Part of what has always drawn me to thinking about living history is this unpredictability, and the potential for meaning making in different ways. But precisely because of this, we have not yet fully accounted for living history's singularity as an approach—and thus, have not given living history (and particularly, its own *history*) the multifaceted consideration it deserves. Possibly historians are not inclined to deal with these inquiries: when meaning is nonverbal and indeterminate—as it is with affect—this brings the objectivity question to the fore.

It is perhaps not a coincidence, then, that many innovations in the world of living history—those, incidentally, that sought to bring the practice from something like civic religion towards scholarly methodology—were made by someone who was not trained as a historian. James Deetz, who helped to develop the practice of historical archaeology, began to participate in digs at Plimoth Plantation in the late 1950s, as he finished up his doctorate in anthropology at Harvard University. Plimoth, the site of an early settlement of separatist Puritans, was being turned into a "memorial to our Pilgrim Fathers," akin to Rockefellers' Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, with funding from the Boston financier Harry Hornblower. As Deetz would remember in 2000, "A visitor entering the village in 1959 was confronted by a postcard-perfect picture. Indeed, far too perfect to begin to approximate the true nature of the early settlement, but it was right up to date with what was then known concerning the establishment of period open-air museums." In the 1950s and the '60s, Plimoth—and other sites like it—advanced a quaint, preindustrial version of the past; it was then called a "replica village" and functioned as a memorial in the way that Hornblower had intended.[12]

But while the site of Plimoth and the reconstructed houses built on top of it functioned as a kind of interactive Pilgrim pageant, it was also full of potential for scholarship and interpretation. Deetz is best known for his 1977 book *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Everyday American Life*, which used finds like earthenware, gravestones, and tools to more fully understand the lived experience of early Americans.[13] Much of Deetz's material for this book came from Plimoth Plantation; he had done some of his graduate work there, and remained involved with the site through the 1950s and into the 1960s. In 1967, after a period as faculty at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Deetz returned to New England and was named assistant director at Plimoth Plantation. Building upon his interest in everyday material life, he saw an opportunity for new research. Almost immediately, he began making changes to the site, seeking to bring it closer to what he believed it might actually have looked and felt like in the 1620s.

12 James Deetz and Patricia Scott Deetz, *The Times of their Lives: Life, Love, and Death in Plymouth Colony* (New York: W. H. Freeman & Co., 2000), 276.

13 James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977).

Plimoth's mannequins in situ. Notice the clean costumes and ornate wooden furniture. Postcard c. 1960s. (Collection of author)

Plimoth in the 1950s and 1960s was like a life-size diorama that visitors, used to marveling at artifacts in museums, or at historical pageants, could gaze upon and wander around. Each of the re-created buildings had a sign hung out front that identified the family that was supposed to have lived there. Inside, handmade mannequins created by an artisan friend of one of the Hornblowers—including several dozen at prayer in the meetinghouse—were arranged *mise-en-scène*. These mannequins were joined by costumed "guides and hostesses" (the positions were thus gendered), who helped provide directions and historical background, as well as give an occasional cooking or music demonstration. Both employees and mannequins were dressed in tidy polyester reproductions of the kind of costumes one might find in nineteenth-century depictions of Pilgrims—the visual inspiration for Plimoth.[14]

Deetz's aim was to create a Plimoth Plantation that looked less like a painting and more like a struggling agricultural village. First, he took down the signs that identified the occupants within from the exterior of each house. Inside, he banished

14 Jean Poindexter Colby, *Plimoth Plantation: Then and Now* (New York: Hastings House, 1970). See also Edward Collier, "Plymouth Plans an 'Open House' on Thanksgiving, *Chicago Daily Tribune,* November 19, 1961; T.F. James, "Pilgrims' Progress," *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 1963;

overelaborate antique furniture (varnished eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pieces) from overstuffed rooms, replacing it with simple, but well-made reproductions of seventeenth-century pieces. The mannequins were also removed and the interpreters were given new costumes—natural fibers and brighter colors—as research had revealed that this was closer to the way that Plimoth's 1627 inhabitants had dressed. To further populate the village and to evoke the smells and sounds that would have been present in the seventeenth century, Deetz brought in livestock, introduced farming, and hired Jay Anderson, a specialist in historical foodways, to oversee the expansion of this program. Deetz also introduced extensive applied training so that interpreters were informed about and could discuss every aspect of daily life in the seventeenth century.[15]

By the 1970s, Plimoth Plantation was a very different place. Interpreters (whom Deetz would later rename "informants") worked with the land, the structures, and the animals. As the shocked visitor from the story recounted to Stephen Eddy Snow had noted, their clothing and appearances reflected the hard manual work they were doing, which included—under the tutelage of folklorist Henry Glassie, visiting for the summer—building houses based on excavated site plans. By mid-decade, they were also beginning to experiment with "first person" interpretation; instead of talking about their 1627 counterparts as "they," interpreters were beginning to say "I" and interacting with audiences in these personas.[16] The effect was an immersive one: visitors felt like they had stepped back into the seventeenth century. At the time, these developments were met with a significant amount of attention by commentators both inside and outside the museum world. Although some praised the work that Deetz and his colleagues were doing, others worried about first-person interpretation giving audiences a false sense that they were seeing "how it really was."[17] In this debate over living history as interpretation an old question, that of objectivity—the responsibility that historians feel towards empiricism—again came to the fore.[18]

The changes that occurred at Plimoth were particularly radical, but they differed only in degree from similar developments at other living history sites. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the living history farm and museum movement was growing. Plimoth's peer institutions, such as Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, and Greenfield Village in Michigan, modified their interpretive plans to feature the stories of everyday farmers and

15 James Deetz, "The Reality of the Pilgrim Fathers," *Natural History,* November, 1969, 32–45; James Deetz, "The Changing Historic House Museum: Can It Live?" *Historic Preservation* 23 (1971): 50.

16 Deetz, "The Changing Historic House Museum."

17 Thomas J. Schlereth, "It Wasn't that Simple," *Museum News* 56 (January/February 1978): 36–41; Cary Carson, "Living Museums of Everyman's History," *Harvard Magazine* 83 (July–August 1981); Robert Ronsheim, "Is the Past Dead?," *Museum News* 53, no. 3 (November 1974): 16–17.

18 James Deetz, "The Link from Object, to Person, to Concept," in *Museums, Adults, and the Humanities,* ed. Zipporah W. Collins (Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 1981), 24–34; Deetz and Deetz, *The Times of their Lives*.

Building a house at Plimoth Plantation, 1980. (Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division).

workers, putting more emphasis on immersion and interactivity. Although these efforts would not be fully realized until the following decades, Colonial Williamsburg's historians were beginning to consider the experiences of enslaved and free African Americans in their research and interpretation, while protests by Wampanoag and American Indian Movement activists were challenging the interpretation at Plimoth Plantation. The world of living history was changing, shifting slowly from memorials to preindustrial American to scholarly enterprises interested in the everyday life of the past.[19]

Most significantly, hundreds of smaller initiatives were popping up all over the country. "Living history farms" themselves were not necessarily a new idea; for at

19 Andrew H. Baker and Warren Leon, "Old Sturbridge Village Introduces Social Conflict into its Interpretive Story," *History News*, March 1986; James Deetz, "A Sense of Another World: History Museums and Cultural Change," *Museum News* 58, no. 5 (May/June 1980): 40–45. See also Anders Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg: The Restoration of Virginia's Eighteenth-Century Capital* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 121–72; M. J. Rymsza-Pawlowska, *History Comes Alive: Public History and Popular Culture in the 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 135–38.

least twenty years, agricultural historians affiliated with universities, museums, and government agencies had been proposing "demonstration farms" where researchers could test historical methods and approaches, but the idea gained steam in the late 1960s.[20] In 1970, a coalition of academic agricultural historians and museum researchers met at Old Sturbridge Village for a symposium on American agriculture. The majority of the presentations, carefully curated by John T. Schlebecker of the Smithsonian and Wayne Rasmussen of the Department of Agriculture, were scholarly in nature, with panel titles such as "Science and Technology in Agriculture," and "Measuring Agricultural Change." Like Deetz, these historians were interested in research through practice—in the absence of other kinds of records, they wanted to learn about everyday life and agricultural work through experimentation (here too, we see traces of history's empiricism). They were less interested in public-facing interpretation (what Freeman Tilden and others had begun to advocate for), more so in research through enactment. Only one paper, "Clio in Costume: History Museums and Historiography," given by Barnes Riznik of Old Sturbridge Village, gave an indication that things might be changing.[21]

From this landmark symposium emerged ALHFAM, the Association for Living History Farms and Agricultural Museums. This organization grew considerably in subsequent years, meeting annually and becoming a clearinghouse for best practices, networking, and other professionalizing activity. Interestingly, the agricultural historians who had overseen its founding moved into the margins of the organization, which by the middle of the decade was dominated by museum practitioners of historical agriculture, as opposed to academic scholars. In 1970, John T. Schlebecker had written to a colleague about the people who he thought would be interested in living history farms: "historians, geographers, plant and animal scientists, and museologists."[22] By 1985, Jay Anderson would characterize the living history community thus: "museum interpreters, reenactors, buckskinners, history buffs, hobbyists, and academic historians."[23] In a very short time, in other words, different groups of people became interested in living history and the practice became as much about interpretation as demonstration.

Participants in and commentators on this surge of activity—both at the time and reflecting on the changes—have given many different reasons for this sudden

20 Herbert Kellar, "Living Agricultural Museums," *Agricultural History* 19 (1945): 186–90; Marion Clawson, "Living Historical Farms: A Proposal for Action," *Agricultural History* 39, no. 2 (1965): 110–11; Darwin Kelsey, "Outdoor Museums and Historical Agriculture," *Agricultural History* 46 (1972): 105–27. See also Jay Anderson, *A Living History Reader* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981).

21 Program for Symposium on American Agriculture, September 16–18, 1970, folder 13, box 4, record unit 240, Division of Agriculture and Mining Records, National Museum of History and Technology, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, DC (henceforth, SIA).

22 John T. Schlebecker to Bill Barksdale, May 22, 1970, folder 13, box 4, record unit 240, SIA.

23 "Farm-in Planned At OSV," *Worcester Gazette*, August 1, 1970; Jay Anderson, *The Living History Sourcebook* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1985), ix; John T. Schlebecker and Gale E. Peterson, *Living Historical Farms Handbook* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972).

development. One common account is that living history was a site at which to practice the new social and material history, the investigation of the lives of everyday farmers and workers on the margins of society. Often, these groups left little in the way of "traditional" (i.e., written) archival sources, so the best way to learn about their lives was to re-create them.[24] Many of the individuals who were at the forefront of living history research and practice, whether it be James Deetz at Plimoth, Cary Carson at Williamsburg, or Richard Rabinowitz at Old Sturbridge Village, were academically trained scholars of social history and material culture. Deetz had a concurrent teaching appointment at Brown as he began working at Plimoth, and both Carson and Rabinowitz had been educated in doctoral programs at Harvard. These somewhat unique stories have come to stand in for the whole—partly because of the significant influence that these individuals and others like them had on their respective sites, and because historians that moved between academic and museum-based history continued to publish traditional scholarship alongside more reflective pieces about practice. Certainly, the rise of social history is one of the many factors that can help us account for this surge of practice, but it is not the only one.[25]

Related to the connection made between academia and living history was an explanation for its growth that ties it to the traditional understanding of the rise of public history. This interpretation links the growth of public history to a surplus of students graduating from doctoral programs in history in the late 1960s and early 1970, and posits that because not all of them could find academic jobs, this overflow resulted in the development of public history as a discipline and an approach.[26] However, as scholars like Denise Meringolo, Lara Leigh Kelland, and others have pointed out, the origins of public history are far more complicated than this narrative would suggest.[27] Looking more closely at contemporary living history

24 Ellen Fitzpatrick, *History's Memory: Writing America's Past: 1880–1980* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Irvin Unger, "The New Left and American History: Some Recent Trends in United States Historiography," *American Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (July, 1967): 1239–44, 1257.

25 Carson, "Living Museums of Everyman's History"; Richard Rabinowitz, *Curating America: Journeys Through Storyscapes of the American Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

26 See, for example, Robert Kelley, "Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects," *The Public Historian* 1, no. 1 (Autumn, 1978): 16–28; Howard Green, "A Critique of the Professional Public History Movement," *Radical History Review* 25 (January, 1981): 164–71. For an excellent bibliography of this account, see Patricia Mooney-Melvin, "Professional Historians and the Challenge of Redefinition," and Constance B. Shulz, "Becoming a Public Historian," in *Public History: Essays from the Field*, ed. James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia (New York: Krieger, 2004) 5–42.

27 For more accounts of shifts at living history museums see Tyson, *The Wages of History;* Jessie Swigger, *"History is Bunk": Assembling the Past at Henry Ford's Greenfield Village* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014). For radical histories of public history, see Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2012); Lara Leigh Kelland, *Clio's Foot Soldiers: Twentieth-Century U.S. Social Movements and Collective Memory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018); Daniel Kerr, "Allan Nevins Is Not My Grandfather: The Roots of Radical Oral History Practice in the United States," *The Oral History Review*, 43, no. 2 (September 2016): 367–92; "Radical Roots," series on History@Work, blog, http://ncph.org/history-at-work/tag/radical-roots/.

practice will likewise add to this position, as the people at the forefront of these developments—the rank and file at places like Plimoth, the new members of ALHFAM starting their own living history farms—were not academics. In fact, "traditional" academicians are only a small part of this story—in the case of ALHFAM, agricultural historians seem to be mostly absent from proceedings after 1975.

What then was driving these shifts in site interpretation and the flowering of living history practice in the 1970s? The factors I have mentioned are certainly part of the story, but they do not fully explain the complexity of living history's development. In order to make better sense of this complexity it is necessary to examine not only the institutional changes within scholarly and museum history itself, but also larger cultural shifts that had a significant impact on living history's interpretation, ethos, and personnel. Although they went about it in various ways, different sectors of the counterculture-at-large were brought together by a rejection of mainstream culture and many of its dominant institutions. Instead, adherents strove for authenticity, personal fulfillment, and enlightenment through aesthetic forms and alternative living.[28] I want to argue not only that identification with the American past was a significant part of the countercultural attitude, but also that many living history practitioners shared this ethos.[29] This commonality and its dimensions are best understood via critical attention to the shared *forms* of both countercultural and living history practice.

By 1970 Plimoth was, according to Stephen Eddy Snow and his informants, inhabited by "pot-smoking, guitar-strumming youth."[30] This characterization is corroborated in James Deetz's own memoir, which recalls letters from visitors who complained that the "new" Plimoth was "rundown and shabby," and like "a hippie village of today."[31] From the records of the ALHFAM proceedings, we see traces of the counterculture across the wider world of living history. By 1975, practitioner and scholar Edward L. Hawes had this to say about the movement: "Clearly, the living historical farm and community are important phenomena in the museum world. Products of the interaction of a number of cultural currents in the sixties; they mean many things to many people. At the outset, they represented attempts to get at various realities of the social and natural environment not included in museums before. In the seventies, they may become institutions of escape, places for indulging in nostalgia."[32] The references here to "escape" and "nostalgia" place

28 See Doug Rossinow, "The Revolution Is About Our Lives: The New Left's Counterculture," in Braunstein and Doyle, *Imagine Nation*, 99–124.

29 On the historical sensibility of countercultural denizens, see Steven Conn, *Americans Against the City: Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 229–76.

30 Snow, *Performing the Pilgrims,* 37.

31 Deetz and Deetz, *The Times of their Lives*, 280.

32 Edward L. Hawes, "The Living Historical Farm in North America: New Directions in Research and Interpretation," *Proceedings, Annual Meeting of ALHFAM,* 1975, Online Archive of Proceedings, Association for Living History Farms and Museums, http://www.alhfam.org/ALHFAM-Proceedings-Online (henceforth, ALHFAM).

living history practitioners alongside countercultural communards, who, as we will see, were being described in much the same way.

A year later, Hawes' sentiments were echoed and expanded by Virginia Wolf Briscoe, a folklorist at the University of Pennsylvania. She wrote, "this kind of activity was an outgrowth of essentially countercultural interests; work in museums of this kind was regarded in the same light as the development of a commune: it was an opportunity for another kind of celebration of unity and simplicity."[33] So, even at the time, practitioners and scholars recognized the connection, seeing the flowering of living history in the context of its surrounding culture.

In retrospect, this is unsurprising. At the same time that those hundreds of living history farms were popping up, so were *thousands* of communes. Not all of them resembled Plimoth and yet many of them did: back-to-the-land enthusiasts were "dropping out" of modern life and trying to live more "authentically," as their forbears did.[34] With the help of resources like *Shelter, Mother Earth News,* and Stewart Brand's mail-order *Whole Earth Catalog*—from which one could order books, kits, and all kinds of supplies—they were building their own homes, farming organically, and experimenting with handicraft. The *Whole Earth Catalog* was like the Sears catalog of earlier times; its pages featured everything from directions on making homemade butter and cheese to seeds for vegetables and crops, to colonial furniture kits. And while some goods advertised on its pages were distinctly futuristic (or even apocalyptic), many of its products reflected a growing interest in traditional goods, approaches, and lifestyles.[35] The editors of *Shelter*, a popular how-to guide for building houses neatly summed up the appeal: "A hundred years ago, over 80% of Americans lived on farms. Like the builders shown in the early pages of this book, American farmers built honest, practical, graceful structures that not only served their intended purposes, but somehow also seemed to harmonize with the surrounding countryside." Turning through *Shelter's* pages, aspiring carpenters could find directions for building sod houses, cabins, and other traditional structures.[36]

33 Virginia Wolf Briscoe, "Living Historical Farms," *Proceedings, Annual Meeting of ALHFAM,* 1976, ALHFAM.

34 See Maren Lockwood Carden, "Communes And Protest Movements in The U.S., 1960–1974: An Analysis of Intellectual Roots," *International Review of Modern Sociology* 6, no. 1 (Spring, 1976): 13–22; Richard Fairfield, *Communes, U.S.A.: A Personal Tour* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972); Keith Melville, *Communes In the Counterculture: Origins, Theories, Styles of Life* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1972). See also Sonya Rudikoff, "O Pioneers! Reflections on the Whole Earth People," *Commentary* 54, no. 1 (July 1972): 62–74; Jinny A. Turman-Deal, "'We Were an Oddity': A Look at the Back-to-the-Land Movement in Appalachia," *West Virginia History* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 1–32.

35 See David Farber, "Self Invention in the Realm of Production: Craft, Beauty, and Community in the American Counterculture, 1964–1978," *Pacific Historical Review* 85, no. 3 (August 2016): 408–42.

36 Andrew Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The* Whole Earth Catalog *and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007); Sam Binkley, *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). See also *The Last Whole Earth Catalog* (June, 1971); Lloyd Kahn and Bob Easton, eds., *Shelter* (1973), 32.

The Charlatans in 1967, by photographer Herb Greene. (Courtesy of Herb Greene and Digital Silver Imaging)

As a matter of fact, many segments of the counterculture were historically minded. The Diggers, one of the most prominent Bay Area collectives, took their name from seventeenth-century British radicals.[37] Others were drawn to the fashions of the Old West, the Victorian era, and the 1920s—one could see "granny glasses" and handlebar mustaches all over San Francisco's Haight Ashbury. Men wore suspenders and tight vests, while women dressed in long lacy dresses and high-heeled boots.[38] In 1965, an individual named Travus T. Hipp (otherwise known as Chandler A. Laughlin III) established the Red Dog Saloon in the isolated mining town of Virginia City, Nevada. The house band, The Charlatans, performed nightly dressed in full Old West apparel, including tall boots, fringed leather vests, prominent belt buckles, and cowboy hats.[39] As Michael Allen has

37 Hogdon, *Manhood In the Age of Aquarius*, 3–37.

38 Jennifer LeZotte, *From Goodwill to Grunge: A History of Secondhand Styles and Alternative Economies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 122–52.

39 See, for example, Joel Lobenthal, *Radical Rags: Fashions of the Sixties* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990). See also Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 84–131; Gretchen Lemke-Santagelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009); 1–34.

Folkwear's Prairie Dress pattern, with illustration by Gretchen Schields. (Collection of author)

noted, the figure of the cowboy, who was seen as representative of nineteenth-century American values, was of especial interest to hippies.[40] The counterculture's interest in the past was pronounced and spanned a number of different referents and aesthetic forms, but it was organized around a sense of the American past as both authentic and instructive.

If there was a more than casual interest in the historical (widely defined) among the counterculture—how, then, did this relate to the living history movement? First of all, there was overlap in source material. ALHFAM proceedings from the early to

40 Michael Allen, "'I Just Want to be a Cosmic Cowboy': Hippies, Cowboy Code, and the Culture of a Counterculture," *Western Historical Quarterly,* 36, no. 3 (Autumn 2005): 275–99. The counterculture was also fascinated with Native American culture to which they ascribed a similar historicity/ahistoricity. For an excellent discussion of this, see Philip J. Deloria, "Counterculture Indians and the New Age," in *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 154–80.

mid-1970s mention a few different ways in which practitioners could obtain clothing or learn methods. Countercultural outfitters like San Francisco-based Folkwear and Sunflower Company in Colorado sold historically inspired patterns, clothing, fabric, and other accouterments to city dwellers, communards, and living history interpreters alike.[41] All three of these demographics were also avid readers of the *Foxfire* magazines and books, which, like *Shelter*, outlined traditional approaches to farming, handicraft, and food preparation.[42]

Countercultural assumptions about the past were shared by living history practitioners. In 1980—ALHFAM's tenth anniversary—the Maine State Museum's Ron Kley led a sing-along to a specially composed song (to the tune of "Coward of the Country," by Kenny Rogers) about a character—a "most peculiar gent"—named Virgil Palmer, who, with the help of ALHFAM's resources, started a small living history farm. The chorus of the song made clear the value that living history practitioners saw in the past: "Yes Virg lived each day in a historical way/And shunned the things that modern farmers choose/For he felt deep inside that he would might soon decide/That hist'try offered something it could use/And someday somethin' old would make the news."[43] Like the editors of *Shelter,* or the cowboy-obsessed hippies Michael Allen writes about, living history practitioners felt that historical *practice*—alongside helping to give insight about the lived experience of the past—was also valuable on its own terms.

We have other documentation of this bidirectional influence beyond the anecdotes related by Snow and others. As Robert Houriet, a journalist who became a communard in the late 1960s recalled, "At their onset, communes looked as though they were simply repeating the past, returning to the secure, natural comfort of a bygone era, escaping upstream to the clean, clear headwaters of the American pioneer experience."[44] In *Life* magazine's July 1969 cover story about "The Family," a 240-acre commune in the Oregon woods begun by Bob Carey, formerly one of Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters, the reporter refers to the commune's visual similarity to a "frontier establishment" multiple times. In the accompanying photographs, women and girls wear long calico print dresses and men wear buckskin shirts and wide-brimmed hats. Commune inhabitants are shown gardening, chopping wood, and building cabins.[45] Bennett Berger, a sociologist who

41 "Folkwear," in Anderson, *Living History Sourcebook*, 323. The company was founded by Alexandra Jacopetti, author of the seminal *Native Funk & Flash*. See Alexandra Jacopetti and Jerry Wainwright, *Native Funk & Flash: An Emerging Folk Art* (San Francisco: Scrimshaw Press, 1974).

42 Eliot Wigginton, ed., *The Foxfire Book: Hog Dressing; Log Cabin Building; Mountain Crafts and Foods; Planting by the Signs; Snake Lore, Hunting Tales, Faith Healing; Moonshining; and Other Affairs of Plain Living* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972). See the 1974–80 proceedings from annual meetings of the Association for Living History Farms and Agricultural Museums, ALHFAM.

43 Ron Kley, "Sing-Along-With-Ron," *ALHFAM Proceedings*, 1980, 24, ALHFAM.

44 Robert Houriet, *Getting Back Together* (New York: Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, Inc., 1971), xiii.

45 John Stickney, "The Youth Communes: New Way of Living Confronts the U.S.," *Life*, July 18, 1969, 16–23. See also Jesse Pitts, "The Counter Culture: Tranquilizer or Revolutionary Ideology?," *Dissent,* April, 1971, 216–29; Sara Davidson, "Open Land: Getting Back to the Communal Garden,"

researched rural communes in the '70s, observed of his informants, "they look like down-home country folks . . . in denim and gingham," further observing that "hippie morality" was "more old than new."[46] In his 1970 commune memoir *Total Loss Farm*, Raymond Mungo describes how he and friends attempted to re-create Henry David Thoreau's famous 1839 canoe trip through Massachusetts and New Hampshire.[47] To look through photographs and articles about commune life in the late 1960s to early 1970s is to see persistent evidence of a certain historical influence in the aesthetic, practice, and values of individual communards.

Expressions of living history outside of the institutional context, such as reenactment-based activities that were part of the 1976 Bicentennial, likewise presented countercultural elements. In an echo of Mungo's journey, Reid Lewis, a high school teacher from Elgin, Illinois, led a team that re-created Robert De La Salle's 1681 expedition from Montreal to New Orleans. Participants trained for sixteen months, doing research to ensure an authentic experience, and adhering as closely as possible to the originals in terms of diet, clothing, and tools. In interviews with a very interested news media, Lewis and his companions talked about their motivation for the trip: to draw attention to ecological concerns, and to highlight self-sufficiency. Lewis and his cohort saw living history as a conduit for environmental activism and consciousness-raising. Here, it is clear that countercultural values were translated into living history.[48]

Another high-profile Bicentennial reenactment was the Wagon Train—a year-long sojourn from points west to Valley Forge Pennsylvania. Although official organizers took great pains to emphasize the "historical authenticity" of the participants, the caravan soon came to look markedly countercultural—as badges, buttons, and patches started to cover the nineteenth-century covered wagons and costumes.[49] Between public appearances, life on the Wagon Train became distinctly communal—several couples got married en route, and the participants forged close ties that they maintained years later. In the memories that they

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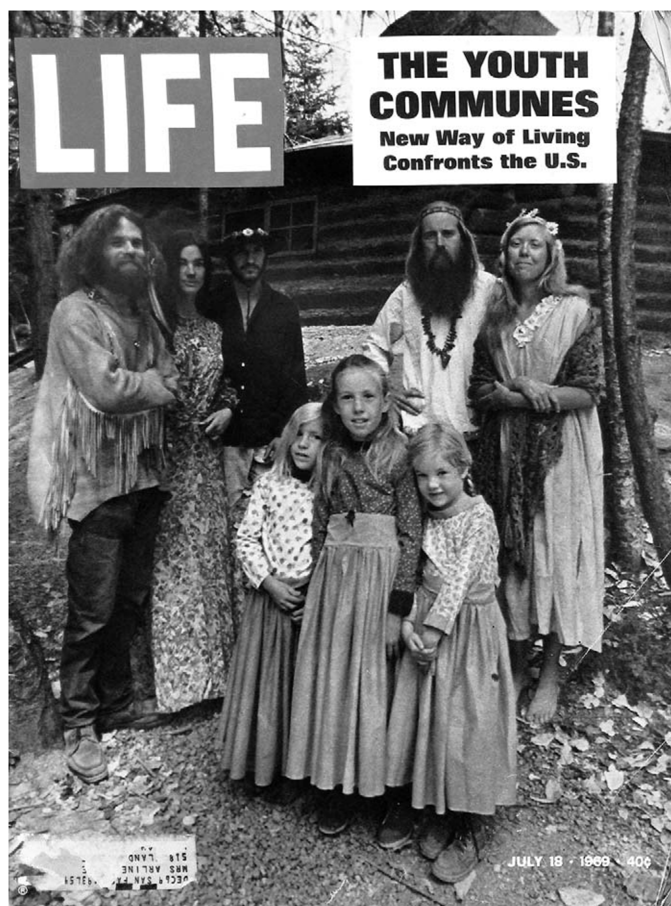
Harper's, June, 1970, 91–100; Bill Kovach, "Communes Spread as the Young Reject Old Values," *New York Times*, December 17, 1970; "Year of the Commune," *Newsweek,* August 18, 1969, 89; Herbert A. Otto, "Communes, the Alternative Life-style," *Saturday Review*, April 24, 1971, 17.

46 Bennett Berger, *Survival of a Counterculture: Ideological Work and Everyday Life Among Rural Communards* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 96. See also Bennett Berger, "Hippie Morality—More Old Than New," *Trans-Action* 5, no. 2 (December 1967): 19–27.

47 Raymond Mungo, *Total Loss Farm: A Year In The Life* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1970).

48 William Crawford, Jr., "Imagine LaSalle Exhorting His Crew, 'Stay Cool, Men,'" *Chicago Tribune*, December 2, 1976; "Canoeists Recreate Voyage by LaSalle," *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1976; Michael Sneed, "LaSalle Explorers Paddle to Success," *Chicago Tribune*, April 4, 1977; Daniel Spurr, *River of Forgotten Days: A Journey Down the Mississippi in Search of LaSalle* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998).

49 Photographs from Wagon Train, box 5, series 15, record group 31: Secretary of Commerce, Bicentennial Wagon Train Collection, State Archives of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. See also Earl Reinhalter, ed., *The WagoNews: A Newsletter for Those Who Travelled with the Great Lakes Route of the Bicentennial Wagon Train,* 4 (Feb-March, 1977) and 5 (April, 1977), folder "Aitkin-Kynett (general) July-December 1976," box 2, record group 31: Secretary of Commerce, series 14, Bicentennial Wagon Train Collection, State Archives of Pennsylvania.



Life cover story from July, 1969. (Collection of author)

circulated after the experience, participants highlighted not the patriotic, public parts of the endeavor (ostensibly the reason for the exercise), but the private, community-building ones. The things they saved, such as hippie buttons, patches, and badges attached to historic costumes, again reflected the way in which the Wagon Train—like many other embodied history endeavors of its time—had ridden on a fine line between the past and the present.[50]

All of these instances, from the calico-wearing communards to the guitar-strumming interpreters, point to a connection and correlation between 1960s and '70s practitioners of living history and the concurrent counterculture, and one that was more direct, pronounced, and intentional than the casual relationship one sees between any cultural practice and its wider context, precisely *because* of the similarity of its form, and the way this, in turn, reflected a shared ethos. This close

50 Tammy Ayer, "Woman Put Life On Hold in 1976 for Wagon Train," *Yakima Herald-Republic*, July 5, 2016; http://www.postregister.com/articles/west/2016/07/05/woman-put-life-hold-1976-wagon-train.

relationship is at once what makes parsing this stream of influence so difficult and so critical. So, the question that is left for the cultural historian is this: how to evaluate this relationship? And why is this important?

First, some questions and further observations. Before we make any kind of a declaration about the relationship between living history during this period and the counterculture, it is worth thinking about what the counterculture actually was—an ongoing debate for commentators both then and now. Historians like Andrew Kirk and Fred Turner have emphasized that alongside the antimodernist strain of this cultural movement, there was also an interest in cybernetics, innovation, and whole systems—in short, with a particular kind of modernism, which therefore would have had quite a different understanding of, and relationship with, the past, present, and future. The most resonant elements—for example, the *Whole Earth Catalog*—managed to combine these instincts. If the motivation for investing in living history farming was, at least partly, an appreciation for historical methods, where would these futurists fit in? Was it only the more historically oriented portions of the counterculture—those who would build communities in old saloons as opposed to geodesic domes—that are relevant here?[51]

If we focus our attention on the commune itself, as opposed to the counterculture as a whole, we bump up against a similar ambiguity. In his studies on the subject, Timothy Miller has tried to differentiate between "hip" and not-hip communes; making the observation that among the thousands of such efforts that sprang up in the sixties and seventies, only a portion were countercultural: others were built around religious or political values. Intriguingly, Miller also makes the point that throughout history, Americans have been uniquely predisposed to utopian experiments, and thus the '70s commune surge must be read properly as part of a longer trajectory, of which the original Plimoth Plantation is also a notable part. James Deetz makes the same point elsewhere in his writing—there is a unique symmetry between Plimoth's 1620s and 1970s denizens.[52] Was new living history, then, "hip"?

In order to address this question, we must again turn to the relationship between living history and the counterculture—from where did influence flow? In his study on the "creative revolution" in advertising, Thomas Frank observes that by the 1970s, the counterculture was everywhere in American consumer culture, whether it was connected with "hip" ness or not—this explains, of course, why the Mayflower descendants encountered by Snow's informants were so definite in their

51 See Kirk, *Counterculture Green*; Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner, eds., *West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965–1977* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012). See also David Farber, "Building The Counterculture, Creating Right Livelihoods: The Counterculture at Work," *The Sixties* 6, no. 1 (May 2013): 1–24.

52 Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999); Timothy Miller, "The Roots of the 1960s Communal Revival," *American Studies* 33, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 73–93.

characterizations. Were living history museums another example of this phenomenon? Were the hippies at Plimoth and on the La Salle reenactment a symptom of the saturation of countercultural values into the mainstream? In that case, our question would be a bit different: was there something about living history practitioners that made them especially susceptible to countercultural values? And once these were adapted, did they change living history practice? But in this same work, Frank also tries to problematize this cooptation thesis by arguing that critiques we associate with the counterculture were prevalent elsewhere in the 1950s and 1960s—the Beat movement, and bestsellers like William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*, for example. In that case, living history people and countercultural people might have simply seized upon similar values based off a common experience—and rejection—of postwar life and culture.[53] Certainly, their visions of the American past as a sort of heyday of self-sufficiency and independence, and a storehouse of useful practice, were often shared.

Clearly, there are more questions than answers here, but they are productive ones that try to get at a deeper reading of why we do the kind of history we do when we do it. Paying attention to form makes visible nontangible commonalities between living history and the counterculture that would otherwise be overlooked. And these commonalities, in turn, move us further away from the objectivity question by acknowledging that we make historical meaning in a number of different ways, none of them in a vacuum.

Methodologically, it is my hope that this case study opens up a different set of questions: what are the stakes of taking seriously this brief interval in the history of living history? How might it change our assumptions about the contours and commitments of public history now? First of all, it continues to chip away at the myth of academic historians descending from the ivory tower and teaching museum people how to engage the past with new methods. Although there were certainly individuals like James Deetz, John T. Schlebecker, and Cary Carson moving between the academic and museum worlds and driving the changes at institutional living history locales, these individuals alone, or even the academic institutions they participate in, do not fully account for this shift. On the contrary, we see in the early history of ALHFAM how quickly "traditional" historians became marginal in the movement and in other accounts of 1970s reenactments, and we see how many different people wanted to be involved—many totally out of the purview of academia.

When we think about living history as a *form* of historical engagement and understanding—not just narrative, scope, actors, content, but *form* itself, as inextricably tied up and in conversation with its own larger context, we open the door to a larger set of questions. Why tableaux vivant in the late nineteenth century? Why period rooms in the 1920s? What does the way that Americans seek to

53 Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

envision, engage with, and play out the past tell us about what they are hoping to gain from it? How does history seep into other forms of popular culture and what may we learn from those leaks? I have no easy answers but I think these questions themselves are critical steps toward a deeper history of public history, in all of its past and contemporary iterations.

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