THE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE AS INTERPRETED BY DOCENTS AT THE CENTRE FURNACE MANSION

A Thesis in
Art Education

by
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ABSTRACT

Museums have gained a major role in the world of entertaining and educational experiences in the twenty-first century. Museum directors, curators, and educators now compete for visitors against zoos, aquariums, and even theme parks. Museums are continually expanding their portfolio of services to include educational programming, interactive exhibitions, and customized tours and walkthroughs by trained docents. This study explores the effects that museum docents have on the visitor experience at the Centre Furnace Mansion in State College, PA. The Centre Furnace Mansion currently staffs 17 volunteer docents ranging from 23 years of age to 92. The staff is primarily female, with the oldest docent being the only male. The longest serving docent has been volunteering at the Mansion for 20 years. Falk (2009) asserts that while museums have always been curious about the motivations behind their visitors, that these motivations have a more critical impact economically and socially than ever before. Analysis of visitor demographics is fundamental to begin exploring visitor patterns and emerging data. Falk went deeper into the global relationship between museum and visitor by documenting the Museum Visitor Experience Model (Falk, 2009). This study utilized extensive site research and employed a survey approach to identify key motivational factors in the ongoing search and maintenance of a volunteer docent staff in the museum setting. In particular, the Centre Furnace Mansion docent group participated in an informational survey to provide insight into their current reflections on the viability of current museum layout, flow, education, and exhibitions.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures ........................................................................................................ vi

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................. viii

Chapter 1: Introduction ............................................................................................ 1

  Objectives ............................................................................................................. 1
  About the Author .................................................................................................... 1
  Underlying Assumptions and Limitations .............................................................. 2
  Centre Furnace Mansion – State College, Pennsylvania ........................................ 3
  Docent Overview .................................................................................................... 4
  A Docent at the Centre Furnace Mansion ............................................................. 5
  Introducing Mary Sorenson, Executive Director .................................................. 6
  The Thompson Family ........................................................................................... 9
  A Tour of the Centre Furnace Mansion ............................................................... 12
    Ground Floor ....................................................................................................... 12
    Main Floor .......................................................................................................... 15
    Second Floor ....................................................................................................... 20

Chapter 2: Summary of Literature .......................................................................... 26

  Visitor Engagement ............................................................................................... 26
  Exhibition Design and Layout of Objects .............................................................. 32
  Interactive Components ......................................................................................... 34
  The Museum Visitor .............................................................................................. 39
  Docent Learning .................................................................................................... 43

Chapter 3: Methodology ......................................................................................... 45

  Survey Overview ................................................................................................... 45
  Survey Implementation ......................................................................................... 46
  Screening Survey .................................................................................................. 47
  Primary Survey ..................................................................................................... 48
    Question One ...................................................................................................... 48
    Question Two .................................................................................................... 49
    Question Three .................................................................................................. 50
    Question Four .................................................................................................... 51
    Question Five ..................................................................................................... 51
    Question Six ...................................................................................................... 52
    Question Seven .................................................................................................. 53
    Question Eight ................................................................................................... 54
    Question Nine .................................................................................................... 54
    Question Ten ..................................................................................................... 54
    Question Eleven ................................................................................................. 55
Chapter 4: Results ........................................................................................................................................... 56

Question One Results .................................................................................................................................... 56
Question Two Results .................................................................................................................................... 57
Question Three Results ................................................................................................................................... 58
Question Four Results .................................................................................................................................... 59
Question Five Results .................................................................................................................................... 60
Question Six Results ....................................................................................................................................... 61
Question Seven Results ..................................................................................................................................... 62
Questions Eight through Eleven—Open-ended Questions ............................................................................. 63
  Question Eight: In your opinion, what part of the CFM tour is the most well-received by children? ............... 64
  Question Nine: In your opinion, what part of the CFM tour is most well-received by adults between ages 18-40? 65
  Question Ten: In your opinion, what part of the CFM tour is most well-received by adults over the age of 40? ............................................................................................................................................ 66
  Question Eleven: What factor most influences you to volunteer as a docent at the CFM? ......................... 67

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions ......................................................................................................... 69

Overview ....................................................................................................................................................... 69
Models of Learning .......................................................................................................................................... 69
Significance of the Study ................................................................................................................................. 75
Implications for Future Research ................................................................................................................... 76

References.......................................................................................................................................................... 77

Appendices........................................................................................................................................................ 83

  Appendix A: Summary Explanation of Research .......................................................................................... 83
  Appendix B: Study Summary .......................................................................................................................... 85
  Appendix C: Screening Survey ....................................................................................................................... 87
  Appendix D: Primary Survey .......................................................................................................................... 88
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1-1: The Thompson Family ................................................................. 11
Figure 1-2: General James Irvin’s 1855 Letter offering land for what is now The Pennsylvania State University ......................................................... 11
Figure 1-3: Floor Plan of Ground Floor at the Centre Furnace Mansion .................. 13
Figure 1-4: Exterior View of the Centre Furnace Mansion ........................................ 14
Figure 1-5: Hearth Room ...................................................................................... 14
Figure 1-6: Museum Store ..................................................................................... 15
Figure 1-7: Floor Plan of Main Floor at the Centre Furnace Mansion ....................... 17
Figure 1-8: Front Entry Hallway ............................................................................ 18
Figure 1-9: Moses’ Parlor ....................................................................................... 18
Figure 1-10: Mary’s Parlor ...................................................................................... 19
Figure 1-11: Founder’s Room .................................................................................. 19
Figure 1-12: Dining Room ....................................................................................... 20
Figure 1-13: Floor Plan of Second Floor at the Centre Furnace Mansion .................. 22
Figure 1-14: Bedroom (Mini-mansion Room) .......................................................... 23
Figure 1-15: Master Bedroom ................................................................................ 23
Figure 1-16: Children’s Bedroom ......................................................................... 24
Figure 1-17: Bedroom ............................................................................................ 24
Figure 1-18: Library ............................................................................................... 25
Figure 2-1: Contextual Model of Learning (Falk & Dierking, 1992, p. 5) ................. 40
Figure 2-2: The Museum Visitor Experience Model (Falk, 2009, p. 161) ................. 42
Figure 3-1: Overview of the Experiment .................................................................. 45
Figure 4-1: Results for Question One: What factor most inspired you to become a docent at Centre Furnace Mansion (CFM)? .................................................. 57
Figure 4-2: Results for Question Two: In your opinion, what is the most important demographic to consider when tailoring content for education at the CFM? ............... 58
Figure 4-3: Results for Question Three: In your opinion, what is the CFM’s target audience? ................................................................. 59

Figure 4-4: Results for Question Four: What factor most affects your decision to continue volunteering at the CFM? ................................................................. 60

Figure 4-5: Results for Question Five: From the following list, choose which technological upgrade would be most beneficial to the CFM. ................................. 61

Figure 4-6: Results for Question Six: From the following list, choose which non-technological upgrade would be most beneficial to the CFM. ................................. 62

Figure 4-7: Results for Question Seven: If you were describing the CFM to a friend, what word would you choose to best describe the experience of touring the museum? ........ 63

Figure 4-8: Three common themes of the Centre Furnace Mansion (CFM) docent and visitor experiences................................................................................................ 63

Figure 5-1: Docent responses to the adolescent audience at the Centre Furnace Mansion..... 70

Figure 5-2: Stereoscope from the Founder’s Room................................................................. 71

Figure 5-3: Docent responses to 18-40 year-old visitors at the Centre Furnace Mansion...... 72

Figure 5-4: Docent responses to adults over the age of 40 visitor group at the Centre Furnace Mansion............................................................................................... 73

Figure 5-5: Docent responses to the motivations of a volunteer at the Centre Furnace Mansion................................................................................................. 74
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During the final round of editing this thesis, I received the news that the oldest docent at the Centre Furnace Mansion passed away at age 92. Mary Sorenson, Executive Director of the Centre Furnace Mansion, wrote the following statement to me in an email—“I learned earlier today that Cliff Bastuscheck has passed away. I know he will be missed by all of us who knew him. Cliff has been a very active docent and volunteer with CCHS for over 10 years and taught us all so much about iron making. He would sometimes say that if he had chosen another career, it would have been teaching and that was why he always enjoyed his role as docent. He was a super teacher!”

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Objectives

Museums have gained a major role in the world of entertainment and educational experiences in the twenty-first century. Museum directors, curators, and educators now compete for visitors against their counterparts in zoos, aquariums, and even theme parks. Museums are continually expanding their portfolio of services to include educational programming, interactive exhibitions, and customized tours and walk-throughs by trained docents. This study explores the effects that museum docents have on the visitor experience at the Centre Furnace Mansion in State College, PA, and how they interpret those experiences.

About the Author

As a lifelong learner and student of visual art and design, I have gained an affinity for museums and historical sites. I’m an educator with an interdisciplinary background and hold a Bachelor of Science in Interior Design, a Master of Arts in American Studies, and a Doctor of Psychology in Communications Media and Instructional Technology.

I was first introduced to the Centre Furnace Mansion by Richard Pencek, Emeritus Faculty of Kinesiology at The Pennsylvania State University. After taking my first tour of the Mansion, I felt an immediate connection to the Mansion staff and have become friends with the former and current directors. I completed independent study
credits towards my art education master’s degree, where I was asked to perform a multitude of duties including performing as a docent, volunteering with the Stocking Stuffer fundraiser, and converting the Mansion blueprints to CAD (Computer-Aided Drawings). Through my learning experience with the Mansion, I became interested in learning about what keeps the Mansion running, in particular the Mansion docents and what inspires them to continue learning and volunteering.

The Mansion employees demonstrate such vigor, enthusiasm, and devotion to promoting the history of the Mansion and surrounding area. The Mansion has a personal spot in my heart as it was the setting where the future Pennsylvania State University was established, my alma mater. Running on a fraction of the budget of larger historical sites, it does not lack in historical significance or culture.

**Underlying Assumptions and Limitations**

The survey for this study was distributed to the docents at the Centre Furnace Mansion (CFM). Out of seventeen active docents, fifteen completed the questions, although one survey was partially completed. It is to be assumed, but not guaranteed, that the questions were answered truthfully. Questions one through seven on the survey contained pre-defined answers as well as an open-ended response.
Centre Furnace Mansion – State College, Pennsylvania

Centre county citizens founded the Centre County Historical Society in 1904. Their main goal was to preserve and disseminate history of the county. It is recognized as the official historical society of Centre County (Centre County Historical Society, 2012 Year in Review). The Centre Furnace Mansion became the headquarters of the historical society in 1990. “Today, we have embarked on a new journey to renew the connections between Centre County’s residents and their past” (Centre County Historical Society, 2012 Year in Review). The mission of the Centre Furnace Mansion is to “help people understand, experience, appreciate and preserve our county’s cultural and natural heritage” (Centre County Historical Society, 2012 Year in Review). The Year in Review (2012) publication provides a foundation and vision, stating:

CCHS aspires to enrich the lives of the public by telling the story of the county’s unique past. Through our programs, collections and facilities, we promote a strong sense of place for a diverse Centre County. We seek to build a critical understanding of our past for both engaging the issues of the present and guaranteeing a future which preserves our heritage.

The Centre Furnace Mansion collaborates with local historical societies, libraries, and a variety of Penn State departments in advancing county historical programs. The Annual Preservation Awards bring attention to achievements and historic preservation
across the county’s organizations, businesses, and individuals (Centre County Historical Society, 2012 Year in Review).

In 2012, programming included *Exhibitions in Civil War*, the archeological record of Native Americans, iron making, wood working tools, and household objects of the 19th century. In commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, the Mansion hosted *Civil War 150 Road Show* exhibition and attracted over 2,000 visitors. Twelve hundred visitors participated in the two (largest) annual fundraisers—the Spring Plant Celebration and the Stocking Stuffer Sale. The Society hosted more than 7,000 visitors to the Mansion and the Boogersburg School, which included over 700 students partaking in the school tour program (Centre County Historical Society, 2012 Year in Review).

According to the 2012 Year in Review, ongoing strategic goal areas for the mansion are:

- Achieving and maintaining financial stability.
- Improving marketing and communications.
- Increasing membership and outreach to the public.
- Strengthening our organizational structure and enhancing our physical plant.
- Increasing and enhancing our educational and programmatic activities.

**Docent Overview**

A museum docent is a trained teacher and guide (Burcaw, 1997). There are two important levels of training for docents—training centered around the museum and its
contents and training for the docent as an educator. This training for docents should not be taken lightly, Burcaw asserts, as this service, though voluntary, will take much time and effort, and is crucial to the success of the museum as an educational institution. Museum docents are a special kind of volunteer, as shown by their dedication of time, learning, and teaching (Grinder & McCoy, 1985).

Hooper-Greenhill (2005) suggests that some visitors are more apt to visit a museum as a social calling. The result is unspecific learning goals that are likely to be interpreted by the docents on a case-by-case basis. Others, Hooper-Greenhill believes, are looking for an educational experience, and in this case the background and education of the docent or guide becomes paramount to an enjoyable visit.

A Docent at the Centre Furnace Mansion

The Centre Furnace Mansion currently staffs 17 volunteer docents ranging from twenty-three years of age to 92. The staff is primarily female, with the oldest docent being the only male. The longest serving docent has been volunteering at the Mansion for twenty years. Training periods are less formal than larger institutions and vary depending on the background of the new volunteer. The Mansion offers an annual docent training, and informal shadowing throughout the year for acclimation. Six of the 17 docents are former schoolteachers.
Mary Sorenson, Executive Director of the Centre Furnace Mansion, states the following (M. Sorenson, personal communication, November 3, 2014):

The idea that the entertainment aspect is equally as important as the educational component in the museum visitor experience being explored in recent years is so interesting and important. I think our docents go far to expand the experience to a social and entertaining one…

A passionate historian and volunteer, Mary Sorenson described her introduction to the Centre Furnace Mansion as one similar to a “calling” (M. Sorenson, personal communication, November 3, 2014). She has always had an affinity for historic sites and the role they play in modern society.

Mary began volunteering at the Centre Furnace Mansion in 1999 when Jackie Melander, CCHS President since 1982, mentioned she was looking for assistance in the development of the gardens (M. Sorenson, personal communication, November 3, 2014). A business owner, she started volunteering as the gardens coordinator, and it wasn’t long before she decided to make a more permanent transition to the Mansion.

As gardens coordinator, she began with research on period integrity, to make sure the gardens were conforming (M. Sorenson, personal communication, November 3, 2014). Mary was also encouraging the growth of the gardens by coordinating a group of volunteers with a similar passion, which eventually transformed into the Master
Gardening Program. Over time, the gardens became a standard part of the Mansion’s tour.

In 2010, Mary accepted the Executive Director role (M. Sorenson, personal communication, November 3, 2014). At the same time, she began to serve as a docent, taking years of informal guides and sharing of research and focusing it into giving proper tours. It was this combination of serving as Director and docent alike that helped focus her efforts on developing the docent staff to be as strong as creative as possible. She states, “The one philosophy, or perhaps understanding, I have always had is the idea that every individual that is drawn to volunteer brings their own unique and valuable set of skills and talents. When these skills, enthusiasm and talent pair with projects and work that suits, it truly is magic! It is this piece that is very fascinating and rewarding to me about working in a volunteer based organization.”

Mary Osborn, Docent Coordinator for the Centre Furnace Mansion, wrote this statement about what it means to be a docent at the Mansion:

Giving tours of the Centre Furnace Mansion is a very flexible endeavor, and no two tours are alike. Visitors may be interested in architecture, decorative arts, clothing, social history, industrial history, the family, or the iron industry (or none of the above, if the family comes with teenagers!). They may be able to stay for 15 minutes, or want to see the entire house in a two-hour in-depth tour. In addition, some visitors come only to see one of the temporary
exhibits that are on display in the Hearth Room or the ice house building.

Mansion docents are asked to sign up for one three-hour time slot per month, and can sign up for more if desired. They are also encouraged to attend periodic docent meetings, which will occur on a weekday, usually quarterly. While on duty, docents may sell books and gifts, show visitors through temporary exhibits, give directions to other sites, encourage memberships, answer the phone, and help with small administrative or collections-related tasks, if they have time (Centre Furnace Mansion Docent and Greeter Information Guide).

The Executive Director of the Centre Furnace Mansion views the staff of docents and greeters as the face of the Mansion and of the Centre County Historical Society (Centre Furnace Mansion Docent and Greeter Information Guide). During a visit, docents are encouraged to follow a general theme to ensure an enjoyable and memorable visit.

Prior to starting the tour, docents are asked to offer a warm introduction and to introduce themselves by name. Some housekeeping items include offering to hang coats and/or backpacks and indicate locations of restrooms that visitors may need to use during or after the tour. It is also important that the docent consider any special needs for the visitors that are about to begin the tour. Finally, it is encouraged to ask if any of the visitors have specific interests (such as 19th century furniture, architecture, textiles, etc.) so that those interests can be addressed or enhanced during the tour.
After this phase of the introduction is complete, docents focus on the tour itself. They are asked to explain to the visitors that a tour usually last a little over an hour and to confirm that this is convenient for the group. An abbreviated tour is available if preferred. An overview of the layout of the museum follows to complete the pre-tour activities.

During the tour, docents are required to wear white cotton gloves (to assist in preserving any objects they may handle during the tour) and ensure that visitors do not touch the furniture and artifacts during the tour. At convenient times throughout the tour, the docent can ask visitors to sign the guestbook and provide them with handouts and printed material about the museum, the Historical Society, or other topics as appropriate.

After the tour is over, the docent invites the visitors to tour the gardens and grounds on their own and thanks them for their time and interest. Finally, the docent provides an informational brochure with an invitation to join the Historical Society and to return for other special events throughout the year.

**The Thompson Family**

Moses Thompson (1810-1891) married Mary Irvin in 1938 (The Thompson Family History, n.d.). He purchased a 1/6 claim of James Irvin’s (Mary Irvin’s brother) furnace company in 1842.

That same year, Moses, his wife Mary, and two children took residence in the Centre Furnace Mansion (The Thompson Family History, n.d.). Moses was employed as resident ironmaster of Centre Furnace during its second era. Stevens describes the ironmaster’s duties:
An ironmaster had the major responsibility of finding buyers for the [iron] pigs and castings, providing for their transport to market, collecting money from sales and land rent, and paying the workmen. He also had to superintend the finances of the store, the gristmill and the sawmill, and to make decisions about what ore mines to open and what new tracks of woodland to use for coaling, as older tracks were depleted (1985, p.10).

He and James Irvin, despite the fact that they were ironmasters, were more interested in supporting education and agriculture than the iron industry (Brief Penn State History, n.d.). Together, they offered land and funding to the Pennsylvania Agricultural Society, who in turn built Farmers’ High School. This school eventually transformed into what is now The Pennsylvania State University (Brief Penn State History).

Moses Thompson and his wife, Mary, had eight children during their lifetime (Sarah, Elizabeth, John, James, William, Anna, Mary, and James), six of whom grew into adulthood. Much of the Thompson family history is preserved in the Centre Furnace Mansion today, as you will find in the Mansion tour outline below (The Thompson Family History).
Figure 1-1: The Thompson Family

Figure 1-2: General James Irvin’s 1855 Letter offering land for what is now The Pennsylvania State University
A Tour of the Centre Furnace Mansion

This section introduces the floor plans of the Centre Furnace Mansion and the specific rooms and details that docents talk about when giving a tour of the Mansion.

Ground Floor

The ground floor contains the museum entry area and museum shop, as well as restrooms and a private area for docents, but focuses on the Hearth Room (Centre Furnace Mansion Docent and Greeter Information Guide). The house was originally built as a log cabin in 1792. The fireplace is original, and the names on the bricks indicate where they were made. The docents feature various iron tools and equipment, asking the tour group “Can you guess what this is?” and other interactive questions. This floor of the house also features a map highlighting furnace locations in Centre County. The docent mentions that Centre County was named after Centre Furnace, and shares a model of an iron furnace, asking questions like “What four natural resources are required to make iron?”
Figure 1-3: Floor Plan of Ground Floor at the Centre Furnace Mansion
Figure 1-4: Exterior View of the Centre Furnace Mansion

Figure 1-5: Hearth Room
Moving upward to the main floor, you’ll find the Dining Room, the Founder’s Room, the Front Entry Hallway, and two parlors (Centre Furnace Mansion Docent and Greeter Information Guide).

The Dining room features a table set for a formal family dinner and fancy furniture. The docent mentions that these are indicators of wealth, along with having a fireplace in every room. This room contains a sideboard and linen press, and tour groups might even see a demonstration of “turning the rug” if in season.

The Founder’s Room features a picture of James Irvin, Moses’ brother-in-law and business partner, a letter written by James, and a stereopticon. A very interesting fact
shared by docents is that The Pennsylvania State University (at the time called the Farmer’s High School) was founded in this room.

   The Front Entry Hallway was used to greet guests. The docent shows featured artifacts such as a calling card tray and a pier (or petticoat) mirror that doubled as a way to reflect light on lower portions of the room. When talking about other items in the room such as artifacts on the étagère like books and seashells, the docent asks the group questions like, “What does this tell you about the family?”

   The two parlors are named Mary’s and Moses’. Moses’ Parlor is where the gentlemen sat after dinner. Moses’ portrait hangs above the fireplace, and the room features other artifacts such as an ear trumpet, pocket doors, and beautiful wallpaper.

   Also adorned with beautiful wallpaper is Mary’s Parlor, where ladies went after dinner. This room features a portrait of Mary, a Weber piano with family photos, a petticoat mirror, and candles and a chandelier with mirrors that reflect light—no electricity was installed until the 1920’s.
Figure 1-7: Floor Plan of Main Floor at the Centre Furnace Mansion
Figure 1-8: Front Entry Hallway

Figure 1-9: Moses’ Parlor
Figure 1-10: Mary’s Parlor

Figure 1-11: Founder’s Room
Second Floor

The second floor of the Mansion features Mary’s Sitting Room, all of the bedrooms (once graduate student apartments), the Mini-mansion Room, and the Library (Centre Furnace Mansion Docent and Greeter Information Guide).

Mary’s Sitting Room is where ladies of the Mansion sat to read, play music, and do hand needlecrafts.

The Children’s Bedroom features a crib, and a portrait of a little boy (the docent explains that boys wore dresses until age 6 in this era). This room also contains wooden toys, a dollhouse, period clothing in the closet such as little leather shoes, a potty chair, and a desk/sink.
Moving to the Master Bedroom, here you’ll find Elizabeth’s wedding dress and a view of the furnace stack from the window. Also, a stove is featured in the fireplace in this room, as well as rugs covering an unpainted spot on the floor, a beaver hat and collars, and a wide variety of period clothing. The docent explains that a woman like Mary Thompson, in this period, would wear about 30 pounds of clothing on a normal day.

The final bedroom, the South East Bedroom, features mourning clothing, a rope bed with straw mattress (docents suggest this could be the origin of the saying, “Good night, sleep tight, don’t let the bed bugs bite.”) Other artifacts in this room include a hair wreath with wax flowers, various hair jewelry, and ladies’ fans.

The Mini-mansion Room is next on the tour, featuring a replica of the Centre Furnace Mansion and a painting of the plain brick mansion. Docents feature a “mystery doorway.”

Finally, the CCHS research library is visited by the group, which features signatures of two of the Thompson children (Sarah and Elizabeth) under glass. The docents explain that this section of the mansion is an addition, and directs the group to see the original outline of the window and door in the brick wall.

The docent leads the group down the back staircase, and before returning to the Hearth Room, takes them through the Main Floor Kitchen. This room was added in 1846 and features a new cooking fireplace, various cooking items with a butter churn, and a safe behind the wall for secure storage of valuables.
Figure 1-13: Floor Plan of Second Floor at the Centre Furnace Mansion
Figure 1-14: Bedroom (Mini-mansion Room)

Figure 1-15: Master Bedroom
Figure 1-16: Children’s Bedroom

Figure 1-17: Bedroom
Figure 1-18: Library
Chapter 2: Summary of Literature

In this chapter, I’ll review literature that covers a focused group of research topics, including museum visitor engagement, exhibition design and layout of objects, interactive components, and informal learning. The chapter will conclude with a review of the museum visitor experience and docent learning.

Visitor Engagement

Decades ago, museums focused efforts on engaging visitors primarily with traditional, or object-based exhibitions. Packer’s qualitative study (2008) on exploring visitors’ perceptions of museum experiences looked for the beneficial outcomes that are not considered to be traditional learning outcomes that visitors sought when visiting museums. A clear focus is set on finding the attributes of the museum setting that visitors value, the experiences they engage in, and the benefits they derive. Packer’s research confirms that visitors seek to have satisfying experiences while exploring museums and that museum staff must formulate different approaches and attitudes for them. A shift has occurred from just focusing on collecting, preserving, and exhibiting objects to also meeting the visitor’s needs. Additionally, Packer’s study brings the idea of “restoration” as an outcome of a museum visit. Learning that visitors use museums as an escape, to relax and recover from the stresses of life, she notes that further attention should be given to this concept. In order for museum staff to meet the complex needs and expectations of their visitors, they must look to the challenges of seeing museums as a destination for visitors to immerse themselves in a setting unrelated to their regular day-to-day routines.
While most museum visitors travel in groups, the individual needs to make connections with the exhibited object(s) (Kinghorn & Willis, 2008). They believe viewing an artifact is an individual activity, even if the visit is a social event out of the visit. How we can measure the connection, and eventually learning, is still being debated. Hohenstein and Tran argue in their research, (2007), that the majority of learning at an object-based (or traditional) exhibition occurs when multiple people converse about the object and its importance. Packer acknowledges that many museums feel pressure to conceptualize and measure their effectiveness in contribution to community lifelong learning. Packer thinks that all of the benefits of a museum experience may not necessarily be measured by the most broadly defined learning outcomes. She notes that museums in the 21st century must place a greater emphasis on understanding and meeting visitors’ multiple needs, rather than solely focusing on collecting, preserving, and exhibiting objects. Although Packer clearly identifies a research problem, she does not address a clearly formulated question in her conceptual framework. However, she notes that her qualitative research report was designed to, “investigate the value and benefits of museum visitation, from visitors’ perspective, and in particular to explore the perceived impact of a museum visit in terms that are not related to learning outcomes” (2008).

Grenier’s research (2009) in utilizing docents as interpreters of objects is beneficial in understanding the subject matter at hand and thereby delivering a positive experience to their visitors. In seeking to go beyond the existing research of visitors’ experiences in museums, Packer identifies certain elements that must be available for a visitor to have a fully satisfying experience. She addresses Prentice’s “four levels of demand” (activities, settings, experiences, and benefits) in order to understand the
meanings behind visitors’ experiences. In order to investigate how the existing bodies of knowledge match with the visitors’ perceptions of experiencing a museum, Packer took a qualitative approach and transcribed detailed accounts of visitors (taken from fifteen-minute long interviews) of the Queensland Museum in Queensland, Australia.

Packer conducted her research at the Queensland Museum, which is a museum of natural history, cultural heritage, science, and human achievement. The museum’s facility was refurbished into a modern setting (prior to Packer’s research study), and it has a range of permanent exhibitions that are available to guests without an admission fee. A special exhibition, *Life and Death in Ancient Egypt: Keku’s Story*, hosted by the Queensland Museum, was the exhibition in which Packer found her participants. *Keku’s Story* contained “a range of Egyptian artifacts, including mummified human and animal remains, amulets, linen wrappings, food bowls, papyrus funerary texts, jewelry and extravagantly decorated sarcophagi,” which Packer felt would be appealing to a large audience and thus suitable for her study. She interviewed a total of sixty visitors (thirty-nine females and twenty-one males) as they exited the Queensland Museum and they were asked, among many other questions, whether or not they attended *Keku’s Story*. Sixteen interviews were conducted with couples; therefore, Packer conducted a total of forty-four interviews, averaging fifteen minutes in length. Packer notes that of those who were approached to participate in an interview, about eighty percent agreed. Packer did not specifically write if she looked for certain characteristics upon interviewing, but of those who did participate, the population was nearly divided in half between “Local Residents” and “Tourists,” as well as the age groups “Under 35” and “35 and Over.”
Packer interviewed sixty adults as they exited the museum. Since some of the interviewees were in pairs, a total of forty-four interviews were recorded. Packer notes that all interviews were recorded by way of audio and later. She asked the following questions, as identified on page 38:

- What do you feel you have gained from the visit?
- If you think about yourself now, and yourself when you first arrived, what would you say has changed?
- Would you say your mood has changed at all?
- Did you learn anything about yourself during the visit?
- Has it changed the way you feel or think about yourself?
- Has it changed the way you understand your place within the world?
- Was there anything about the visit that made you feel good (or bad) about yourself or about the world?
- Did the visit enhance your relationship with your companion(s) in any way?
- Was there any part of your museum visit that spoiled your experience in any way?
- In general, what do you value most about visiting museums? Why is this important to you?
After transcribing the interviews, Packer divided them into “meaningful segments” and explains that it refers to the main idea, or a linked sequence of ideas, behind the visitors’ museum experiences. Theoretical categories were used to code the segments, defined as: Servicescape, Satisfying Experiences, Restorative Elements, Psychological Well-being, and Restoration. Once she established the categories, Packer constructed a theoretical framework to encompass everything under three main headings: Settings, Experiences, and Benefits.

This qualitative study examined the beneficial outcomes that are important to museum visitors, outside of traditional learning outcomes that have been commonly researched in the past (Packer, 2008). Packer identifies three main levels of the meaning of the museum experience: The setting’s attributes which visitors value (including the traditional object and label layout), the experiences visitors engage in, and the benefits visitors derive. After formulating a coding system, Packer built a theoretical framework from the three levels of meaning. By analyzing the transcribed interviews, Packer looked for specific attributes to code under the three levels, in which many contained sub-categories. Qualities of Servicescape (ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality, signs and symbols) are coded under the first level of Settings. The second level, Experiences, contained two sub-categories: Satisfying Experiences (object, cognitive, introspective, and social); and Restorative Elements (fascination, being away, extent, compatibility). The third level of meaning, Benefits, contained three sub-categories: Psychological Well-Being (autonomy, personal growth, environmental, mastery, purpose in life, positive relations, and self acceptance); Subjective Well-Being (happiness); and Restoration (relaxation, peace and tranquility, and thoughtfulness).
Packer’s article did not identify quality control measures that may or may not have been implemented during her qualitative study. It is not known if she conducted all the interviews during an afternoon, or throughout successive visits. It appears as though adults over the age of eighteen were selected, but Packer could have elaborated on that. Additionally, she does not detail how her sample was chosen and could explain more if participants were randomly selected as they exited the museum, as every n\textsuperscript{th} visitor, or chosen as soon as she finished the previous interview. These details are important for readers to know in order to follow-up with a future study.

The results of Packer’s qualitative study are credible and useful in educational facilities, including museums, and other institutions that serve visitors. Packer acknowledges research conducted by Doering on page 33, writing that museums hold social worth and in order to view visitors as clients, “we need to understand the meaning and value of a museum visit from the visitor’s perspective.”

A detailed report of visitors’ perceptions of their experience at the Queensland Museum is included by Packer in the qualitative report. The following highlights some of Packer’s conclusions: The Setting was important to visitors in aiding to their experience. Ambient conditions, such as “atmosphere” were specifically identified as important to the visitor, along with lighting, space, temperature, and noise. The majority of participants were pleased with the updated interior of the Queensland Museum. In cases where visitors toured the museum adjacent to school groups, they equally noted the atmosphere, but in using descriptive terminology such as “noise” and “over-crowding.” Spatial layout and functionality were valued by the visitors as being related to comfort and wayfinding. Visitors appreciated seating areas that were located within the museum, and the fact that
the museum was easily traveled. Overall, the visitors identified their trip as a satisfying experience, noting that they enjoyed seeing “the real thing” in an object or exhibition that they previously read or heard about. A few noted that they appreciated seeing things that were familiar to them, a geographical setting, or even an object, which they could use as the basis for a story with their children or partner. Visitors appreciated the way objects were placed, and a few said that they were pleased with the amount of effort designers and curators took in designing exhibitions. Two-thirds of the visitors admitted to enjoying learning about things that were unusual to them, and just over half of the sample pointed out how the exhibits led them to “see things from a different perspective.”

**Exhibition Design and Layout of Objects**

The design of an exhibit and the layout of objects are crucial for visitors in enabling them the best opportunity to view and make connections, adding to their overall experience. A few decades ago, most museums, through their curatorial and design staff, promoted one path of travel in an exhibition. Within the past decade, however, researchers discovered that visitors enjoy being able to tour a space without being forced in a single direction, and more importantly, without feeling penalized if they did not follow a predetermined path. Taking this insight into consideration during the conceptualization stages of planning an exhibit is not easy. Add to that combination the artifacts or objects, the museum docents and staff, and the social interactions between guests, and the equation becomes ever more difficult.
Whether traveling alone, in pairs, or with a group, visitors will travel through a museum’s space systematically, but sometimes unpredictably. Although not easily achieved, a good spatial layout features elements that are independent from sequential spaces so there is more than one path of travel (Wineman & Peponis, 2010). Macdonald (2007) suggests that even if there is only one specific route to tour an exhibition, some visitors will ultimately breeze through it, without a pause, no matter how great the exhibition seems to another person. Visitors generally look around and may stop to sit still, but they value visiting with another guest, even if they occasionally split up within their group (Voase, 2007).

One challenge for the exhibition curator is to determine the silent strength, or connection, an object can maintain on its own to the museum visitor. Research has shown that visitors are able to connect immediate experiences in an exhibition to prior learning by making connections with their personal lives (Eberbach & Crowley, 2005). People viewing modern exhibitions may have a sense of nostalgia channeled from visiting a favorite museum from an earlier time in their life, such as their childhood (McCarthy & Ciolfi, 2008).

Visitors enjoy new and different experiences while touring an exhibition (Packer, 2008). A lot of time and energy is devoted to transforming museums of their conservative and formal identity, however, new ways of displaying objects and training docents can promote social conversations and enjoyable experiences for the visitor. The design and layout of an exhibition should promote unobstructed views for the visitor, whether they are alone, with a group, or among strangers (Hindmarsh, Heath, Lehn, & Cleverly, 2005).
Museum docents can be trained through classroom instruction and by participating in supervised interactions with visitors throughout the exhibition space (Grenier, 2009).

Hendon, Costa, and Rosenberg (1989) seek to address the characteristics of typical museum-goers. Building upon a classic study in England, these researchers discover that visitors like to feel comfortable and at ease in their surroundings. Although they do not look specifically at the immersion of the museum visitor within a particular exhibit, they address the general idea of being immersed in the public facility. Participants repeated throughout their interview that total immersion was a key element to their museum visit. They looked forward to entering a facility in their free time, seen as a leisure activity, to learn and enjoy the company of their friends or family. Also, the visitors Hendon, Costa, and Rosenberg interviewed admitted to enjoying the challenge of new experiences while being able to actively participate in the learning process (2009).

**Interactive Components**

The advancement of technology in society motivates less technological institutions to begin integrating technology into their services. Museums in particular have undergone a major shift into the technological world to augment tours, bring a level of interactivity to the museum visit, and to provide a strong educational aspect to their services.

The Denver Museum of Natural History study, conducted by Harvey, Loomis, Bell, and Marino (1998) examines the effects on traffic flow through a museum hall pre- and post-renovation. During the renovation, design features were assessed and added
based upon the following criteria: “three-dimensional objects, three-dimensional objects within recreations, hands-on and interactive elements, multisensory stimulation, role-playing, lighting that promotes involvement, consistent labels, resonance,” and others. In addition to this initial study of elements, a second study was performed to assess the effect of each of these elements in the quality and level of sensory immersion. The research aids in supporting the positive effect of engaging multiple senses through immersion to improve visitor satisfaction.

Afonso and Gilbert (2006) found that visitors are able to create spontaneous memories through the use of interactive elements in their understanding of different exhibitions. They added to existing research that visitors of entertainment based educational institutions are more than likely to choose their own path and use their own motivations to build their own stories (2009).

Aziz and Associates conducted their research for implementing Bluetooth devices as interactive accessories in museum exhibitions (2009). They sought out to give more in-depth information relating to the exhibits by utilizing Bluetooth technology. As they had found prior to their study, “visitors usually stop at less than half of the exhibit components and [do] not complete a full round to see the museum exhibits” (2009). The goal of implementing a visitor’s Bluetooth-enabled device an interactive aid proposed the visitor’s ability to take the interaction along with them (as an augmentation to the traditional docent) and become a part of a social networking site. The researchers in the Edge of the Wild study include three who are professors of psychology in the United States, and an in-house evaluator at the Denver Museum of Natural History, where the study was conducted (Harvey, Loomis, Bell, & Marino, 1998). Looking at implementing
interactive technologies at their respective museum, all four researchers have key
interests in behavior studies, environmental psychology, evaluations of visitor settings
and the visitor experience. Visitors to the Denver Museum of Natural History were
selected randomly once they entered Boettcher Hall. The selected visitors were not aware
of the investigation before, during, or after it took place, as the researchers were trained
to conduct a “systematic, unobtrusive observation.” The observation period ended once
visitors traveled out of the exhibition hall. After renovations took place at the museum,
the same types of observations took place. During both observations, researchers were
interested in visitor’s allocation of attention “or gaze direction,” number of stops, and the
total amount of time spent at the individual dioramas. Researchers felt that these variables
were strong in identifying a visitor’s psychological flow within the exhibit. The only
quality control measure that was reported was in randomly selecting visitors for specific
observation, after they walked into Boettcher Hall. The researchers felt that it was
important to not engage with the visitors who were being observed. In doing so, the
visitors were not disturbed, which led to the most realistic scenario for psychological
flow. The use of the physical space, environmental feedback (interactive objects),
multisensory stimulation, and object realism were identified as contributing factors for
immersion and psychological flow.

McCarthy and Ciolfi (2008) cite interaction design as “an approach to the design,
development and deployment of interactive technology in specific settings.” There is
merit in applying McCarthy and Ciolfi’s logic to the Denver Museum of Natural
History’s study. The average total amount of time spent in Boettcher Hall was strongly
affected by remodeling and renovating the dioramas and exhibition space. The “survival
time,” the term used to describe the total amount of time a person or visitor spent in the hall, nearly tripled from pre- to post-renovation. Further analyses concluded that interactive components, multisensory stimulation, and dynamic displays influenced the immersion sensory and visitor flow. The researchers identified psychological flow as the optimal experience a visitor reaches when the goal is the experience, or behavior, itself and does not necessarily lead to a reward or future advantage. When visitors are able to engage with objects and be immersed within an exhibition, they tend to have longer, focused concentration and a distorted sense of time, where “the awareness of self is temporarily lost.” Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a behavioral scientist at the University of Chicago, studied the “sense of transcendent harmony” (Hooper-Greenhill, 2005). This described the release of everyday stress and tension through the act of a social visit, such as a museum. Hooper-Greenhill viewed Csikszentmihalyi’s research as a way to study the optimal circumstances, flow, and aesthetics that made up a positive visitor experience.

Promoting social connections between museum visitors and the museum staff are as important as following a developed list of learning outcomes. Museums of the 21st century must actively promote the visitor experience as the institution has evolved as a place people can go to get away from their daily life. In short, “to learn” is not always the first goal a museum visitor has when they walk through the front door. Marketing an addition to an exhibition, or unveiling a target object for the first time can bring people in the door. Social interactions with museum staff and the opportunities to socialize with strangers or people they travel with can make a visitor’s experience enjoyable, thereby setting them up for a return visit.
New meanings can be created by visitors in the explorations and interactions with devices, encouraging people to develop their own discussions and reflections (McCarthy & Ciolfi, 2008). The use of interactive and inclusive elements in an institution creates a better chance to attract a wider, broader audience (Axelsen, 2006).

The utilization of interactive elements through the visitor’s senses creates a better experience but only if the person is comfortable with the technology. Museum visitors are highly technological consumers; they seek out spaces that encompass them through visual, verbal, and aural stimulation (McIntyre, 2009). Museums that utilize interactive elements can be viewed as being more lively and interesting than traditional object-based museums and many times advertise to their advantage (Scott, 2000). The importance of museum stakeholders to identify and understand how people work through and utilize technologies of different media is crucial (McCarthy & Ciolfi, 2008).

The social aspect of a museum visit is just as important to the person as what is contained within the institution, whether they are traveling alone, within in a group, or are familiar with the museum. Visitors value the personnel they come in contact with and appreciate personal interactions with docents and other staff (Leberman & Holland, 2005). Previous interactions with exhibition elements link together to form strong connections between target exhibits among the visitors (Afonso & Gilbert, 2006). “What if” and “Why” types of questions printed on exhibit labels promote social interactions and stimulate conversations between visitors at a science museum (Hohenstein & Tran, 2007).
Macdonald’s work, *Interconnecting: Museum visiting and exhibition design* (2007), begins by acknowledging that past studies in the museum profession actually cover many disciplines. It is because of this, that sometimes research on visitor behavior is not well-coordinated. Museums have existed for centuries, and as motivations of visitors change over time, the necessity for stakeholders to identify the complex needs of the museum visitor has grown. Any museum that decides to ignore these signals risks its popularity and even survival. Instead of forcing knowledge to museum goers from a specific preconceived curriculum, Macdonald notes, researchers are beginning to look at the visitors has being interpreters themselves. In that sense, there lies a chance for knowledge and meaning have more far-reaching implications than if a docent dictates specific facts to the visitors (2007).

Visitors are intrinsically motivated to make the journey through a museum, whether it be an educational or social motivation (Falk, Dierking, & Foutz, 2007). Falk and Dierking (1998) describe the Contextual Model of Learning (Figure 2-1) as the continuously interacting process by which a museum experience is defined. Three key elements are involved in assessment of an experience; the Personal Context, the Sociocultural Context, and the Physical Context.
The Personal Context involves a visitor’s personal knowledge and prior experience with museum interaction. It includes preferences, likes, dislikes, developmental level, learning abilities, and many other attributes. Not only does this element include these pre-defined characteristics, but also a set of anticipated expectation for the outcome of the visit.

The Sociocultural Context explores the relationship between one’s culture and background (including values and beliefs) with his or her perception of a museum experience. Beyond the interpersonal attributes, it also explores the social interaction that occurs during a museum experience.

The Physical Context includes what you see and hear and experience physically during a visit. Architecture, layout, exhibitions, lighting, music – all of these elements combine to form the physical context layer of the overall experience.

Figure 2-1: Contextual Model of Learning (Falk & Dierking, 1992, p. 5)
Falk (2009) asserts that while museums have always been curious about visitor motivations for visiting museums, that these motivations have a more critical impact economically and socially than ever before. Analysis of visitor demographics is fundamental to begin exploring visitor patterns and emerging data. Falk goes deeper into the global relationship between museum and visitor by documenting the Museum Visitor Experience Model (Falk, 2009). This model is depicted in Figure 2-2. Understanding this relationship requires a clear notion that the museum experience takes place before a visitor sets foot inside a physical institution, and ends far after leaving. It is a unique experience that can change every time one visits a museum (Falk, 2009). According to Falk, most “identity-related” motivations for visiting can be categorized as one of the following:

- Explorer
- Facilitator
- Experience seeker
- Professional/Hobbyist, and
- Recharger

These categories are the result of two streams of thought combined from a potential visitor: 1) A person that needs to satisfy an identity-related need through leisure, and 2) the construct of the person’s various models of leisure activity.
“Learning begins with the individual. Learning involves others. Learning takes place somewhere” (Falk & Dierking, 2002). This is a reference to the personal, social, and physical contexts that visitors experience during a museum excursion. The overlap of these coexisting filters are key in analyzing a person’s experience through the Museum Visitor Experience Model (Figure 2-2).
Docent Learning

Docents and guides are integral in helping museum visitors visualize the connections between their lives and the history collected within a museum (Grinder & McCoy, 1985). New interests, the revisiting of past interests, and a shift in time and responsibilities often encourage adults to seek new learning opportunities (Grinder & McCoy, 1985). Their research builds on the foundation that docents are eager to help visitors grow in their cultural awareness through learning.

The complex educational role of a museum requires a strong link between pedagogy and culture (Jameson, 1991). The social and cultural lens is an important filter to use when exploring the educational role of museums and their collections (Hooper-Greenhill, 2005).

Falk and Dierking (2000) assert that well-trained docents are important to ensuring a positive experience for the visitor. McCoy (1989) states, “…the effective museum docent must be trained to work with a variety of audiences and understand learning as an interactive process.” A docent’s learning is constant. Being familiar with the collections within a museum is only the first level of understanding. As they perform more tours and gain insight through feedback of the visitors and gauging reactions to information, they can continue to grow their personal craft (Grinder & McCoy, 1985).

As a docent’s training is as important as the education that they provide to a visitor, it can be assumed that an important factor in the motivation for serving as a museum docent or guide is a core personal dedication to lifelong learning. The active role in learning that today’s student takes is very different from the traditional lecture and
memorization techniques employed in classrooms of the past. As stated earlier, docents are typically middle-aged to older adults, and as such, educational programs and professional development should be catered to learning styles typical of that age demographic. “Older learners respond best when students and teachers share equal responsibility in the learning process and share equal respect for one another” (Spigner-Littles & Anderson, 1999, p. 205). These adult learners can be active participants in the process and when given the opportunity to control part of their learning, motivation for learning can increase even further (James, 2008).

The research reviewed in this chapter is important as a background and foundation for analyzing the data extracted from surveys taken by docents that will be presented in Chapters 3 and 4 (Methodology and Results).
Chapter 3: Methodology

Survey Overview

This study utilized extensive site research and employed a survey approach to identify key motivational factors and educational interpretations of a volunteer docent staff in the museum setting. In particular, the Centre Furnace Mansion docent staff participated in an informational survey to provide insight into their current reflections on the viability of current museum layout, flow, education, and exhibitions. In addition, the survey provided an opportunity for docents to reflect on what changes might be necessary to bring the traditional museum format into the technology age.

Below is a process chart showing a high-level view of the experiment.

The Principal Investigator provided a sign-up sheet in the Centre Furnace Mansion for the staff of docents to volunteer.

The volunteer docents were given an Overview of the Study document, a Summary Explanation of Research document, a Screening Survey, and a Primary Survey

After the surveys were competed, the principal investigator analyzed the data and implemented into the thesis.

Figure 3-1: Overview of the Experiment
Survey Implementation

The developed survey packet was distributed to over 20 docents at the Centre Furnace Mansion in State College, PA. Mary Sorenson, Executive Director of the Mansion, was the on-site contact for logistics and distribution. The survey packet contained 4 items:

1. An overview of the study
2. A detailed explanation of the research
3. A screening survey
4. The primary survey

After reviewing the Explanation of Research, each docent decided whether or not to participate. Those that were interested completed a screening survey that asked four general questions to ensure qualification for the study. Once finished with the screening survey, he or she moved forward and completed the primary survey. Once complete, the docent placed the packet in the folder marked “Completed Surveys.”

An online version of the survey (containing identical information and questions) was available for those docents that were unable to travel and participate physically at the museum. This survey was designed through Qualtrics and emailed to the docent list by Mary Sorenson. Qualtrics is an online survey platform known for its sophistication and simplicity in capturing and analyzing data (www.Qualtrics.com).
Screening Survey

The screening survey was created to ensure compatibility with the study by verifying some basic information about the docent’s volunteer status and history.

1. Do you currently serve as a docent at the Centre Furnace Mansion in State College, PA?
2. Have you served as a docent at the Centre Furnace Mansion in State College, PA for at least 30 days?
3. Is your service as a docent at the Centre Furnace Mansion voluntary (and receive no compensation for your service)?
4. Can you speak and understand the English language?

These questions verify pertinent background information that serves to qualify them for the proper knowledge and history needed to provide quality responses and data for this study. Verifying a docent is currently volunteering (as opposed to being a docent in the past) means they will be up to date on the current mission and focus of the Centre Furnace Mansion. Verifying that a participant has been a docent for at least 30 days means they will have practiced and honed their skill for an appropriate amount of time in order to be able to answer the questions in the primary survey with knowledge. Ensuring that a docent is strictly volunteering and not paid or compensated in any way for their service ensures that their motivations are solely educational, personal, or both.
Understanding and speaking the English language simply ensures the participant will be able to understand the survey questions and respond with appropriate data.

**Primary Survey**

The primary survey used in the study was specifically aimed at gaining insight and data on:

- Key motivations of volunteer docents that inspired their initial venture into the practice
- Docents’ perceptions of the museum’s demographics
- Docents’ perceptions of the museum’s target audience
- Factors that motivate current docents to continue volunteering
- Docents’ perceptions of technology-based needs for the museum
- Docents’ perceptions of non technology-based needs for the museum
- General docent perceptions on the effect of the museum on visitors
- Detailed age demographic data on the reactions of different age groups to the museum tours led by docents

**Question One**

*What factor most inspired you to become a docent at Centre Furnace Mansion (CFM)?*

1. *Interest in local history*

2. *Interest in American studies*
3.兴趣在保存和分享历史知识

4.其他（请具体说明）

根据Grenier（2009）的研究，几乎88%的博物馆提供导览服务，其中大部分由讲解员带领。了解他们成为讲解员的初衷可以有助于收集重要数据，这些数据可以被用于多种方式。例如，对新讲解员的兴趣进行了解可以有助于博物馆院长制定更好的招聘计划。讲解员的动机也可以对参观者体验产生深远影响。

问题二

在您的看法下，您认为在调整教育内容时，应考虑的最重要的人口统计学特征是什么？

a. 年龄
b. 种族
 c. 运动水平
d. 其他（请具体说明）

博物馆在很大程度上通过分析文化和社会，以及尊重博物馆参观者的兴趣来确定目标。（Reussner, 2003）她强调了保存和收集与文化相关的物品的重要性，同时也为一个多样化公众提供访问的机会，这允许非正式的教育。
Museums have many factors to consider when designing floor plans, collection details, and docent education. Perceptions of the docents in regards to the museum’s demographic considerations can help to influence informal education practices and docent alignment with vision and strategies.

**Question Three**

*In your opinion, what is the CFM’s target audience?*

a. Local visitors  

b. Out of town visitors  

c. Penn State alumni  

d. Elementary school age children  

e. Other (please specify)  

Grek (2009) explores museums and galleries and their “re-discovery of the audience.” He emphasizes the transformation of many museums from elitist institutions to audience- and service-driven organizations. His research into the continued retreat of the ideological past of museum curators and trustees brings focus to the visitor. This information can be helpful in finding any gaps in docent education, and perhaps to even better formalize a museum’s vision for target audience.
**Question Four**

*What factor most affects your decision to continue volunteering at the CFM?*

a. *Quality of the facility*

b. *Quality of education provided*

c. *Quality of fellow docents and coworkers*

d. *Other (please specify)*

According to Wolens, Spires, and Silverman (1986), the lack of understanding of adult learning theory in museum or gallery organizations historically led to museum educators who were rich in knowledge and information about their museum, but lacking in ability to train docents effectively. Grenier (2009) emphasizes the importance of addressing the developmental needs of docents in a way that extends beyond knowledge of the setting and history of a gallery or museum. Extracting data from docents about their feelings toward their position can be very helpful in finding gaps in developmental areas such as docent education.

**Question Five**

*From the following list, choose which technological upgrade would be most beneficial to the CFM.*

a. *Website*
b. *Teaching aids*

c. *Electronic/interactive stations*

d. *Other (please specify)*

Schrand (2008) explores the transformation taking place with regards to technology and education. Taylor and Schmidtlein (2000) assess the efficiency and accessibility of learning and how customization will continue to improve education. The implementation of technology into museum settings has been ongoing. The expectation is that more and more people will spend time preparing their visit before actually visiting the museum and look for related information reflecting on what they have seen or missed after visiting the museum. Its effect on visitor experience can be great, and should be assessed for institutions individually. The perspective of the docent with regards to technology can be helpful in creating more efficient and accessible learning for visitors and a heightened experience.

**Question Six**

*From the following list, choose which non-technological upgrade would be most beneficial to the CFM.*

a. *New exhibitions/galleries*

b. *Studio activities*

c. *Upgraded museum store*

d. *Other (please specify)*
Ciolfi and Bannon (2007) research the importance of architectural flow and space within a museum to accommodate and inspire not only the large number of visitors that a museum may host at any one time, but also the variety of demographic populations that may be visiting. The social interaction that results from well-designed maps, directions or instructions, and path layouts is a key element to ensuring a positive experience. This question serves to gain feedback from the docents on any improvements that can be made to the current layout, services, or learning opportunities currently provided by the Centre Furnace Mansion.

**Question Seven**

*If you were describing the CFM to a friend, what word would you choose to best describe the experience of touring the museum?*

a. **Exciting**

b. **Educational**

c. **Traditional**

d. **Other (please specify)**

This question was designed to gain the overall impression of the docents in regards to the full experience of touring the Centre Furnace Mansion.
Question Eight

*In your opinion, what part of the CFM tour is most well-received by children?*

Question Nine

*In your opinion, what part of the CFM tour is most well-received by adults between ages 18-40?*

Question Ten

*In your opinion, what part of the CFM tour is most well-received by adults over the age of 40?*

Questions eight through ten are aimed at determining a docent’s perception of how a tour is received by a visitor. As different age groups visit museums for different reasons, it is important that the institution have adequate educational differentiation for tours and activities. These questions gave the docents the opportunity to express what they feel are the strong points of the Centre Furnace Mansion tours for three global age demographics.
Question Eleven

What factor most influences you to volunteer as a docent at the CFM?

Question eleven gets to the heart of individual motivation for volunteering as a docent. The participants have an open-ended opportunity to provide motivations for volunteering, ongoing positives for continuing in the field, and overall perceptions of the experiences they have participated in while being docents.
Chapter 4: Results

Fifteen docents completed the survey throughout the course of five weeks. All participants met the following screening criteria:

- They currently serve as a docent at the Centre Furnace Mansion
- They have served as a docent at the Centre Furnace Mansion for at least 30 days
- They serve strictly as volunteers, with no compensation
- They speak and understand the English language

Question One Results

As shown in Figure 4-1 below, four participants reported their interest in local history inspired them to become a docent at the Centre Furnace Mansion (CFM), while two attributed it to an interest in American Studies. Five docents responded that their interest in preserving and sharing historical knowledge has been their inspiration behind their volunteer work. Four docents selected the “other” category with one noting they began as a marketing intern, and another became involved on a friend’s urging. The remaining two who selected “other” noted the three main selections, along with “creating an experience for children at their level” and, “an interest in the CFM site itself as a site that gives our community and county a sense of place.”
When asked of the most important demographic to consider when tailoring content for education at the CFM, ten out of fourteen (one abstained) respondents selected Age, as seen in Figure 4-2. One noted specifically that all of the choices (age, ethnicity, and mobility level) while another respondent felt that age and mobility were key. Local history was noted by one docent and Availability was suggested by another.

**Figure 4-1: Results for Question One: What factor most inspired you to become a docent at Centre Furnace Mansion (CFM)?**

**Question Two Results**

When asked of the most important demographic to consider when tailoring content for education at the CFM, ten out of fourteen (one abstained) respondents selected Age, as seen in Figure 4-2. One noted specifically that all of the choices (age, ethnicity, and mobility level) while another respondent felt that age and mobility were key. Local history was noted by one docent and Availability was suggested by another.
Question Three Results

When asked to identify the CFM’s target audience, the participants had difficulty in narrowing down one demographic. Three listed Local Visitors while two selected Elementary School Age Children. Nine docents selected the Other category, as illustrated in Figure 4-3. Of these remaining nine, five noted all of the choices were applicable to identifying the target audience that includes Out of Town Visitors and Penn State Alumni, while three felt that it is Local Visitors and Elementary School Age Children. One response summed up the target audience with a broad overview as “Visitors young and old interested in history.”
Question Four Results

Figure 4-4 illustrates the factor(s) that affects the docent’s decision to continue volunteering at the CFM. One-third of the respondents selected the “Quality of Fellow Docents and Coworkers” as their response while two noted the “Quality of the Education Provided.” Seven of the fourteen responses (one abstained) chose the “Other” option and noted the following: All of the categories (4), Service to the Community (1), Desire to communicate history (1), and Worthwhile Cause (1). One participant who selected all of the categories provided additional insight to their motivation as, “through the work of the earliest to the most current CCHS colleagues—this organization and site have been a first rate preservation and education effort.”
Question Five Results

When asked to identify a technological upgrade to the CFM (illustrated in Figure 4-5), six respondents selected Teaching Aids while four chose Electronic/Interactive stations and one selected the Website. Three docents chose the Other category and specified: Website and Teaching Aids (1), Teaching Aids and Electronic/Interactive Stations “Upgraded computers and printer/scanner equipment” (1), and “I’m not one for 21st century [technology] displayed in 19th century buildings” (1). One respondent did not identify a technological upgrade.
Question Six Results

When asked to identify which non-technological upgrade would be the most beneficial to the CFM, an overwhelming number of docents selected the “Upgraded Museum Store” (nine out of fifteen responses). As illustrated in Figure 4-6, one selected “New Exhibitions/Galleries” and another chose “Studio Activities” while four identified with the “Other” category. In the remaining four, one noted all of the choices were applicable and added, “Certainly a new building to house collections in storage and our offices as well as to do programming.” One respondent felt that the CFM should continue doing exhibits and two believe a timeline pertaining to CFM, “historical events posted of the years of Centre Furnace” would be beneficial as a non-technological upgrade.
Question Seven Results

Figure 4-7 illustrates the adjective used in describing the CFM tour to a friend of each docent. Two-thirds of the respondents (ten out of fifteen) selected “Educational” as the word that best fits the description, while one noted, “Traditional.” In the remaining four answers, “Other” was selected and broken down as follows: Exciting, Educational, and Traditional (1), Exciting and Educational (1), Exciting, Educational, Unique, and Fascinating (1), and Interesting (1).
Figure 4-7: Results for Question Seven: *If you were describing the CFM to a friend, what word would you choose to best describe the experience of touring the museum?*

Questions Eight through Eleven—Open-ended Questions

Figure 4-8: Three common themes of the Centre Furnace Mansion (CFM) docent and visitor experiences
For questions eight through eleven, answers were analyzed with the model pictured in Figure 4-8, differentiated into categories of Interaction, Personal Connection, and Historical Information.

**Question Eight: In your opinion, what part of the CFM tour is the most well-received by children?**

**Interaction**

Docents suggested that learning about Moses, housekeeping procedures and life in a traditional Centre County Victorian home was very well-received by children. The period room and other interactive components also translated well to younger visitors.

**Personal Connection**

Docents believed the younger visitors connected personally with the children-centered areas, such as bedrooms with toys and furniture, model mansion, and stereoscope. Children often send thank you letters and reference these parts of the visit. Hands-on elements such as the CFM tool exhibit and the Lincoln Logs architecture feature are very positive for this audience. Younger visitors often enjoy the connection made with their current lives, comparing the rooms and artifacts with their current-day counterparts.
**Historical Information**

Historical information was the least interesting area for younger visitors, but some elements of the tour did receive positive feedback, such as the Thompson Family Story and the Iron Story.

**Question Nine: In your opinion, what part of the CFM tour is most well-received by adults between ages 18-40?**

**Interaction**

Interactive elements was least interesting to the 18-40 audience, although some docents reported enjoyment from areas of the tour that included objects that could be held.

**Personal Connection**

The 18-40 audience responded most to the tour in the areas of personal connection (as well as historical information). Seeing the house contents and the significance of the house as it relates to Penn State was a strong theme, as was the opportunity to compare this age group's career outlook with the same age group in the days of the Centre Furnace Mansion’s iron production.
**Historical Information**

As stated above, the 18-40 audience responded most to the tour in the areas of personal connection and historical information. The historical connection to Penn State was important to visitors, as was the mutual connection between the Mansion, the community, and Penn State. The 18-40 year old group tends to marvel at the kitchen and the use of "chamber pots."

In this age group, men are interested in the iron making process, while women like to tour the restored house and gardens. Many, until they tour, are unaware of the connection of Moses and Mary Thompson to the beginnings of Penn State.

**Question Ten: In your opinion, what part of the CFM tour is most well-received by adults over the age of 40?**

**Interaction**

For adults over the age of 40, the interactive objects are popular, but even more so are examples in the tour presentation that spark memories from their past regarding the Mansion or Furnace.

**Personal Connection**

The personal connection is strongest with this age group, speaking of connecting with the house in general, and the items in the house are like what "mom or grandma" had. They also spend more time looking at the special exhibits. The "older" adults
especially like to see items that they had seen used by grandparents. They also are very interested in older homes because many of them have renovated "old houses". The iron industry history also intrigues many of them. Many older adults are very interested in historical homes because they relate to their experiences of older homes, their ancestors, and experiences they have had with changes in their lives over the years.

**Historical Information**

As far as historical information, the impact of the CFM and iron industry in Centre County was of importance to this age group. Many of the traveling exhibits are particularly interesting to this audience too. Older patrons enjoy the furniture and decorative pieces and the design of the mansion, as well as the story of the iron industry as it relates to the Victorian times. Many "mature adults" have visited before but return for the variety of educational programs offered.

**Question Eleven: What factor most influences you to volunteer as a docent at the CFM?**

**Interaction**

Docents think the job is fun—they get to teach people about the start of this community. Other docents feel the Mansion and staff is like a family and the Mansion is their home. One docent quoted, “I love history. I love people contact- I enjoy showing the mansion to others who had "no idea" about it.” Another positive aspect was the ability to
spread the history of the mansion to the visitors of various ages, particularly the school children and the mentally or emotionally handicapped. Docents enjoyed learning about history and preserving older buildings. The appreciation expressed by visitors following a tour when they have stated that they have learned something new is evidence that the tour and educational aspects of the Mansion are strong.

**Personal Connection**

One docent first volunteered because of her keen interest in old houses and antiques, I subsequently learned of a family connection to the Thompson family. While the relationship was not direct, it provided her with an impetus to both volunteer, preserve, and be involved.

**Historical Information**

Other motivations include telling the story of an artifact to visitors and educating them in preserving items of the past for the future generation. Interest in local history is also mentioned as a motivation. One docent replied, “The fact that this site is a very unique and well-loved treasure in the community that helps to interpret the rich heritage of the site and of Centre County and its place in the larger framework of PA history and American history. What influences my desire to continue to be involved is the love of the site and the people who are involved.”
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Overview

This study analyzed the motivation and interpretive role of docents at the Centre Furnace Mansion (CFM). The results illustrate that docents take an active role as educators and consider themselves to be engaged in learning as much as the visitor.

Models of Learning

Falk and Storksdieck (2005) note that the Contextual Model of Learning is continuous and encompasses a dialog that extends beyond an individual and their physical and sociocultural environment. The social interactions between a docent and visitor are just as important as the exhibit preparation and educational programming that develops behind the scenes. While the Contextual Model of Learning’s three main areas, *Personal Context, Sociocultural Context,* and *Physical Context* often focus on the visitor experience, they can be similarly applied to the role of the docent.

During the analysis phase of this study, it became apparent that three areas of teaching, sharing, and learning are valued by CFM docents. As noted in Figure 4-8, the open-ended answers suggest cyclical connections between Interaction, Personal Connection (with the environment), and Historical Information. The perceived emphasis of each area is dependent upon visitor age groups.
When asked to identify which part of the Mansion tour is the most well-received by children, sixty-four percent of the responses contained information related to the personal connection that the visitors make between the environment. These answers include the hands-on sharing of the stereoscope, seeing toys and the children’s bedroom, and even the chamber pots under the beds. The scale version of the “Mini-Mansion” resonated with the young population as well, perhaps because the smaller sized visitors can view the detailed mansion in one place, or maybe some compare it to a dollhouse they have at home. Approximately twenty-one percent of the docents feel that Interaction is an important part of tours with the younger audience, and roughly fourteen percent feel that Historical Information plays the strongest role.
Figure 5-2: Stereoscope from the Founder’s Room
When asked to identify which part of the tour is the most well-received by adult visitors between the ages of 18-40, the docents’ responses nearly tied between Personal Connection and Historical Information. Approximately fifty percent of the answers resonated with Historical Information, particularly the connection between the CFM and The Pennsylvania State University. Other interesting connections are the threads between the Thompson family, the iron industry, and Centre county. Roughly forty-two percent of the answers centered around the Personal Connection of the environment and the 18-40 year old visitors. These responses include visitors seeing what the mansion rooms would look like and imagining the idea of living there. Docents feel that the Interaction and hands-on approach for this visitor group is the least important, garnering approximately seven percent of the results.
Similar to their younger counterparts, adults over the age of 40 appear to enjoy the Historical Information and Personal Connection of the tour, according to the docents. Approximately forty-two percent of the answers demonstrated an importance to the Mansion and the region, which include the story of the iron industry and Victorian Era. The traveling exhibits, held in the Ice House in the rear of the property, appear to resonate with the mature population. One docent feels that the traveling exhibitions bring back returning customers who are familiar with the main tour. The Personal Connection with adults over the age of 40 received about thirty-five percent of the docents’ responses. Docents report that this particular age group compares things in the Mansion to what their grandparents had, often conjuring up sentimental memories. While the Interaction group sustained the lowest amount of responses, two-thirds of the comments
from this area related to guests discussing their own memories. Within this visitor audience, it can be noted that the Personal Connection and Interaction with the docents overlap.

Compared to the results from the age groups, the most significant change in the Centre Furnace Model, illustrated in Figure 5-5, illustrates the importance of Interaction and Historical Information among the motivations of the docents. Only six percent of the responses demonstrate a motivation of the Personal Connection, with one docent noting their discovery of ancestral ties to the Thompson family. Interaction hosts forty-seven percent of the responses with docents expressing enthusiasm to share stories with visitors.

Figure 5-5: Docent responses to the motivations of a volunteer at the Centre Furnace Mansion
and learn about the group(s) they are instructing. Docents express a willingness to educate visitors, particularly younger ones, about the connection between the Mansion and the iron industry. Historical Information also earned forty-seven percent of the results, specifically highlighting a collective interest in history. Two of the responses in this group note a need to preserve the past for the benefit of the future, however, it is possible that more inevitably interpret for this reason.

**Significance of the Study**

While much research has been conducted to investigate the learning of a museum visitor, there remain gaps in the field to study how and why docents learn. This study identifies the significant role docents play and address their perceptions of what visitors enjoy while touring the Centre Furnace Mansion, as identified by the qualitative data in chapter four. The responses from the participating docents show they alter their tours on a whim and in many instances, upon the moment of greeting their audience. Docents not only interact with the visitors, but with fellow docents, and the meaning of building a social and educational community is important to them. Small and specialized sites that operate on limited funding can utilize this study to build upon their educational training and support of the docents.
Implications for Future Research

This study explored the motivations and opinions among docents at the Centre Furnace Mansion. The Boogersburg School, located in State College, also offers tours through the Centre County Historical Society. The docents who volunteer with the Boogersburg School did not participate in this survey, but are considered a valuable site for future research. With some insight into Boogersburg School tours, comparisons could be identified between the two historic sites. Additionally, introducing this survey to other institutions would promote stronger outcomes.

Another possible approach for future research lies in obtaining the opinions of visitors. Survey questions could align with the docents’ open ended ones to determine if the two groups report correlating data. Both visitor-generated and docent-generated data are beneficial to the historical society in future educational programming and the mission of each respective institution.
References


Centre County Historical Society (n.d.). *Centre Furnace Mansion: Docent and greeter information guide*.

Centre County Historical Society (n.d.) *Preserving and interpreting Centre County’s cultural and natural heritage.*


Appendices

Appendix A: Summary Explanation of Research

Title of Project: *Examining the Intrinsic Motivations of Museum Docents at the Centre Furnace Mansion*

**Principal Investigator:** Julie L. Gomboc-Turyan, Ph.D.  
**Telephone Number:** (***)*****-****  
**Advisor:** Christine Thompson, Ph.D.  
**Advisor Telephone Number:** (***)*****-****

You are being invited to volunteer to participate in a research study. This summary explains information about this research.

This is an exploratory study that aims to reveal telling data about the motivations of volunteer docents using a sample group from the Centre Furnace Mansion in State College, PA. The continued success and viability of museums depends greatly on the ability to retain volunteer docents, and this study has the potential to reveal important information that could be helpful to museums and administrations that have concerns in this area.

Following is a simple process for the study in which you are interested in participating:

1. You will be handed a Screening Survey.
2. If you meet all of the requirements as described in the Screening Survey, you’ll be given the Primary Survey.
3. After all surveys are competed and secured, the Principal Investigator will analyze the data and implement into the thesis.
4. After completion of the Principal Investigator’s thesis, the data will be destroyed.

The Informed Consent form, the Screening Survey, and the Primary Survey will be kept in hard copy format in a secure location at the Principal Investigator’s residence. Once data has been reviewed and extracted, the hard copies will be destroyed. We will do our best to keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, it is possible that other people may find out about your participation in this research study. For example, the following people/groups may check and copy records about this research:

- The Office for Human Research Protections in the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
- The Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) and
- The Office for Research Protections.

If you have questions or concerns, you should contact Julie Gomboc-Turyan at (***)***-****. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject or concerns regarding your privacy, you may contact the Office for Research Protections at 814-865-1775.

Your participation is voluntary and you may decide to stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

Your participation implies your voluntary consent to participate in the research.
Appendix B: Study Summary

Museums have gained a major role in the world of entertaining and educational experiences in the twenty-first century. Museum directors, curators, and other stakeholders now compete for visitors against zoos, aquariums, and even theme parks. This proposed study topic explores the effects that museum docents have on the visitor experience at the Centre Furnace Mansion in State College, PA, and the motivational aspects of the docent position that make a positive visitor experience possible.

The design of an exhibit and the layout of artifacts are crucial for visitors in enabling them the best opportunity to view and make connections, adding to their overall experience. A few decades ago, most museums, through their curatorial and design staff, promoted one path of travel in an exhibition. Within the past decade, however, researchers discovered that visitors enjoy being able to tour a space without being forced in a single direction, and more importantly, without feeling penalized if they did not follow an elite path. Taking this insight into consideration during the conceptualization stages of planning an exhibit is not easy. Add to that combination the artifacts, the museum docents and staff, as well as the social interactions between guests, and the equation becomes ever harder to solve.

This is an exploratory study that aims to reveal telling data about the motivations of volunteer docents using a sample group from the Centre Furnace Mansion in State College, PA. The continued success and viability of museums depends greatly on the ability to retain volunteer docents, and this study has the potential to reveal important
information that could be helpful to museums and administrations that have concerns in this area.

The most important benefit to society will be the potential for insight into the motivations of museum docents for use by other museums and institutions. As museums experience limited funding, the benefits of retaining and educating quality docents are many. The research into the progression of museums with technology and docent motivation will provide strong conclusions that can have a positive effect in this area.
Appendix C: Screening Survey

Please circle either “Yes” or “No” to answer the following 4 questions.

1. Do you currently serve as a docent at the Centre Furnace Mansion in State College, PA?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2. Have you served as a docent at the Centre Furnace Mansion in State College, PA for at least 30 days?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. Is your service as a docent at the Centre Furnace Mansion voluntary (and receive no compensation for your service)?
   a. Yes
   b. No

4. Can you speak and understand the English language?
   a. Yes
   b. No
Appendix D: Primary Survey

For questions 1 through 7, circle the answer that most closely matches your personal feelings about serving as a docent at the Centre Furnace Mansion. For questions 8-11, write in your own words.

1. What factor most inspired you to become a docent at Centre Furnace Mansion (CFM)?
   a. Interest in local history
   b. Interest in American studies
   c. Interest in preserving and sharing historical knowledge
   d. Other (please specify):

2. In your opinion, what is the most important demographic to consider when tailoring content for education at the CFM?
   a. Age
   b. Ethnicity
   c. Mobility level
   d. Other (please specify):

3. In your opinion, what is the CFM’s target audience?
   a. Local visitors
   b. Out of town visitors
   c. Penn State alumni
   d. Elementary school age children
   e. Other (please specify):

4. What factor most affects your decision to continue volunteering at the CFM?
   a. Quality of the facility
   b. Quality of education provided
   c. Quality of fellow docents and coworkers
   d. Other (please specify):

5. From the following list, choose which technological upgrade would be most beneficial to the CFM.
   a. Website
   b. Teaching aids
c. Electronic/interactive stations

6. From the following list, choose which non-technological upgrade would be most beneficial to the CFM.
   a. New exhibitions/galleries
   b. Studio activities
   c. Upgraded museum store
   d. Other (please specify):

7. If you were describing the CFM to a friend, what word would you choose to best describe the experience of touring the museum?
   a. Exciting
   b. Educational
   c. Traditional
   d. Other (please specify):

8. In your opinion, what part of the CFM tour is most well-received by children?

9. In your opinion, what part of the CFM tour is most well-received by adults between ages 18-40?

10. In your opinion, what part of the CFM tour is most well-received by adults over the age of 40?

11. What factor most influences you to volunteer as a docent at the CFM?