

GIVEN PEANUTS AND TOLD TO MAKE A CIRCUS: THE LIVING HISTORY
PROGRAMS AT PHILMONT SCOUT RANCH, 1973-2019

by

Amber Leigh Hullum, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in History
May 2022

Committee Members:

Nancy Berlage, Chair

Ruby Oram

Justin Randolph

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2022

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Sonia Torres Rodriguez... you know what you did.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Texas State University Department of History, my fellow graduate students, and all the professors who helped me through this journey. I especially would like to thank Dr. Nancy K Berlage, Dr. Ruby Oram, and Dr. Justin Randolph for serving as my mentors throughout graduate school. Without these individuals, this thesis would never have been written.

I would also like to thank Philmont Scout Ranch, and every present or former staff member that worked with me in any capacity. Philmont is a very important place for all of us, and this thesis was a labor of love. I especially would like to thank David O'Neill and Dave Werhane for allowing me to conduct interviews with them and granting me access to the archives.

Finally, I would like to thank my roommates and friends for supporting me throughout my time at Texas State University. Thank you for reading my works, for giving me advice, and for putting up with my shenanigans.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Living history is a uniquely American form of historical interpretation. This widely popular (if not unusual) method of interpretation garners excitement and engagement with history—a field that many Americans consider boring and irrelevant. Each year, hundreds of thousands of visitors attend living history sites across the states to experience history “first-hand” from costumed interpreters portraying historic figures. Many visitors who interact with these interpreters feel as if they travel back into time. Since the mid-twentieth century, living history sites have become increasingly popular across America, with high numbers of annual visitors. Indeed, sites such as Connor Prairie, Greenfield Village, and Colonial Williamsburg, respectively boast 400,000, 1.8 million, and 560,000 visitors each summer.¹ Living history sites serve as centers of public education and historical engagement. Yet these venues are often overlooked by historians who instead focus on traditional interpretive methods in museums and historic sites. Furthermore, living history tends to earn disapproval from academics who deride living history as kitschy and celebratory.² Living history sites deserve more critical attention from public

¹ “2018 Fact Sheet,” Connor Prairie, Last visited March 26, 2022, [https://www.connerprairie.org/about/media-center/2018-fact-sheet/#:~:text=Spanning%20more%20than%201%2C000%20wooded,visitors%20of%20all%20ages%20annually; Mich Dearborn, “The Henry Ford Exceeds Expectations Attracting More Than 1.8 Million Visitors,” The Henry Ford, January 15, 2020, <https://www.thehenryford.org/about/press-room/press-releases/the-henry-ford-exceeds-expectations-attracting-more-than-1.8-million-visitors/>; Robert Brauchel, “Colonial Williamsburg Bears Down to Raise Revenue,” The Virginia Gazette, October 20, 2017, <https://www.dailypress.com/viriniagazette/news/va-vg-colonial-williamsburg-revenue-legacy-20170921-story.html#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20visitors%20has,2000%20to%20568%2C932%20in%202016.>](https://www.connerprairie.org/about/media-center/2018-fact-sheet/#:~:text=Spanning%20more%20than%201%2C000%20wooded,visitors%20of%20all%20ages%20annually;MichDearborn,‘TheHenryFordExceedsExpectationsAttractingMoreThan1.8MillionVisitors,’TheHenryFord,January15,2020,https://www.thehenryford.org/about/press-room/press-releases/the-henry-ford-exceeds-expectations-attracting-more-than-1.8-million-visitors/;RobertBrauchel,‘ColonialWilliamsburgBearsDowntoRaiseRevenue,’TheVirginiaGazette,October20,2017,https://www.dailypress.com/viriniagazette/news/va-vg-colonial-williamsburg-revenue-legacy-20170921-story.html#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20visitors%20has,2000%20to%20568%2C932%20in%202016.)

² Several historians have pointed out that living history sites tend to portray history through “rose-tinted” lenses, often straying away from any critical analyses in fear that it would drive away visitors and lose revenue. Eric Gable and Richard Handler even satirically called Colonial Williamsburg “Republican Disneyland” in their groundbreaking work *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*. Another work that addresses the celebratory nature of living history sites is Kate F. Stover’s “Is It Real History Yet?: An Update On Living History Museums” in the *Journal of American Culture*.

historians given their impressive numbers of annual visitors and ability to engage the public with the past.

Academic historians and professional interpreters often hold living history as an educational method mutually exclusive from other methods of public history. While living history interpreters utilize primary and secondary sources for their work, just as public historians, they must compile and dispense their knowledge using much different tactics. Therefore, professionals within the living history field follow vastly different guidelines and practices in their respective field than other public historians. Living history is somewhat ostracized from the wider field of public history for these reasons. Indeed, those who call themselves “interpreters” often associate the field of interpretation with outdoor/ wildlife programming and organizations such as zoos, aquariums, nature centers, and parks, along with traditional cultural and historic sites.³ Public historians and living historians share a common goal of interpretation. The National Association for Interpretation (NAI) defines interpretation as: “a purposeful approach to communication that facilitates meaningful, relevant, and inclusive experiences that deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and inspire engagement with the world around us.”⁴ All of the sites that work with the NAI try to incorporate this goal into their mission statements, no matter the differences in their facilities and programs. The NAI has several partnerships with historic sites across America, and many living history programs follow the aims and

³ “What Is Interpretation?” National Association for Interpretation, Last visited March 26, 2022, https://www.interpnet.com/nai/interp/About/What_is_Interpretation/_nai/_About/what_is_interp.aspx?hkey=b5ddeff3-03a8-4000-bf73-433c37c8a7af.

⁴ Ibid.

methods of the NAI.⁵ Although different living history sites around the country seem unified in their goals and practices, the field of living history seems disconnected from the field of public history.

Most scholarly sources that discuss living history interpretation do not address the disconnect that living history has from the wider field of public history. Many sources instead discuss living history as its own field, and only sometimes acknowledge any outside influences on it. In 1957, Freeman Tilden, a mentor and liaison with the National Park Service, published *Interpreting Our Heritage*—arguably the most influential book in the field of interpretation—that provides a foundation for appropriate and successful interpretation.⁶ Nearly every program or organization that uses living history as a method of historical interpretation bases their training on Tilden’s philosophies. In 2011, Larry Beck and Ted Cable expounded on Tilden’s guidelines with their book *The Gifts of Interpretation: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture*.⁷ In 1997, Richard Handler and Eric Gable published a comprehensive analysis of Colonial Williamsburg in their book *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*.⁸ In this, Handler and Gable expose the effects of consumerism and manufactured authenticity at America’s most popular living history site. Other books such as Scott Magelssen and Rhona Justice-Malloy’s *Enacting History* and Mike Wallace’s *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on Public Memory* address the

⁵ “NAI Annual Reports,” National Association for Interpretation, Last visited March 26, 2022, https://www.interpnet.com/NAI/interp/Resources/NAI_Administrative_Documents/Annual_Reports/nai/_resources/Admin_Docs/Annual_Reports.aspx?hkey=d8383245-ae76-4400-98d9-d466bcb5c91b.

⁶ Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁷ Larry Beck and Ted T Cable, *The Gifts of Interpretation: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture* (Urbana, IL: Sagamore Publishing, LLC, 2011).

⁸ Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

dangers of entertainment with the theatrical side of living history interpretation.⁹ Because they discuss how dangerous overly theatrical living history can be, these works first acknowledged the power that living history has in engaging audiences. In 2013, Amy M. Tyson addressed issues of gender inequality and the emotional toil of doing professional living history in her book *The Wages of History: Emotional Labor on Public History's Frontlines*.¹⁰ This book reveals the emotional and financial challenges that living history interpreters face on an individual level through interviews and observations.

Few comprehensive analyses of living history sites in the United States exist and none center their analysis on how local living history sites reflect national trends within the professional field of history. Living history and traditional public history sites have both been shaped by the same outside socio-political forces and professional developments for decades. The field of public history first emerged after the liberal social movements of the 1960s. Since then, public historians have focused on telling the 'new social history' in their work, with emphasis on everyday people and their lives. In the 1980s, the rise of the conservative New Right changed how Americans consumed history, with heavy focus on family-centered entertainment and nostalgia. By the 1990s, popular sites like the Smithsonian and Colonial Williamsburg worked to incorporate difficult, more diverse narratives into their interpretation. In the early 2000s, the National Park Service and National Association for Interpretation expanded their guidelines and standards, which other public history sites followed. By the 2010s, the field of living

⁹ Scott Magelssen and Rhona Justice-Malloy, *Enacting History* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2011); Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on Public Memory* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Amy M Tyson, *The Wages of History: Emotional Labor on Public History's Frontlines* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013).

history interpretation saw new literature that helped to further shape the practice. All these external forces influenced public history—more specifically, living history—interpretation, gradually changing the field over time.

This thesis observes this transformation through the history of Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico. It is the world’s largest youth camp, boasting fifteen different living history camps within its 140,171 acres of mountainous backcountry.¹¹ The living history staff at these fifteen camps portray different histories of New Mexico and the American West with topics such as railroading, gold mining, homesteading, fur trapping, and the Civil War. Staff members at each of these fifteen camps portray a specific year (dates range between 1831-1941) in-character by using first-person historical interpretation.¹²

This case study will also help give due acknowledgment to a class of public historians rarely discussed. In 2012, public historian Benjamin Filene published a compelling article that urged other professional historians to pay more attention to what he calls “outsider historians,” those without professional education or training that engage the public with history outside of museums and universities.¹³ Filene argues that many of these “outsider historians” help to establish strong emotional ties between the public and the past, often times with more passion than their institutional counterparts. Living history interpreters

¹¹ “Quick Facts,” Boy Scouts of America: Philmont Scout Ranch, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.philmontscoutranch.org/resources/promotephilmont/quick-facts/#:~:text=Philmont%20is%20the%20world's%20largest,12%2Dday%20treks%20this%20summer>.

¹² “Philmont Scout Ranch Living History Camps, Dates, and Program Focus,” Document given to author by David O’Neill, Philmont Director of Backcountry Programs, October 14, 2020.

¹³ “Passionate Histories: ‘Outsider’ History-Makers and What They Teach Us,” *The Public Historian* Vol. 34, No. 1 (Winter 2012).

generally fall into this category of “outsider historian,” and thus do not receive the same level of scholarly attention or analysis.

Philmont Scout Ranch offers a unique lens to view living history within the wider field of public history because nearly 22,000 campers visit each summer; however, it is open exclusively to Scouts rather than the general public.¹⁴ As a private location, Philmont’s living history programs evade the knowledge of most historians, yet they carry a complex and lengthy history that beg for analysis. I have worked as a living history interpreter at Philmont Scout Ranch for five years, which gives me the experience and insider knowledge to begin tackling the herculean task of deconstructing and understanding these unresearched (and largely unknown) living history programs.¹⁵

Philmont first opened in 1938, when wealthy oil baron Waite Phillips donated nearly 36,000 acres directly to the Boy Scouts of America. Phillips later donated more land, and today Philmont Scout Ranch has over 140,000 acres for Scouts to explore. Each participant pays \$1,295 to attend Philmont, and with an average of 22,000 campers, Philmont has a rough income of \$28,490,000 each summer.¹⁶ Scout troops attend Philmont Scout Ranch to take backpacking treks across the mountainous property, for a standard length of twelve days.¹⁷ Along their trek, campers stop at several backcountry camps run by Philmont staff members to learn and participate in different programs.

¹⁴ “Quick Facts,” Boy Scouts of America: Philmont Scout Ranch, accessed November 13, 2020.

¹⁵ I began my work in 2016 as a backcountry Program Counselor. Program Counselors at living history camps serve as historical interpreters, under the leadership of a Camp Director. By 2019 I was hired as a Camp Director and have since served as Camp Director at different living history camps in the backcountry, up to 2022.

¹⁶ “Fees,” Philmont Scout Ranch, Last visited March 26, 2022, <https://www.philmontscoutranch.org/philmonttreks/fees/>.

¹⁷ Recently, Philmont has introduced shorter treks that last for nine- or seven-days total. However, the twelve-day trek is standard.

Some of these programs include mountain biking, archeology, astronomy, or living history. Today, there are thirty-five total camps spread across the Philmont backcountry. Of those, fifteen have living history programs. This paper will only focus on the living history camps, which I often refer to as “backcountry camps.”

Philmont relies on the work of a large staff. In 2019, Philmont had 1,303 staff members and a record-breaking 24,029 campers.¹⁸ Although run by the Boy Scouts of America—later renamed Scouts of America—Philmont had female campers and staff members starting in the 1970s (albeit with much lower numbers compared to recent years).¹⁹ Scouts on trek must be between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one, while staff members must be at least eighteen years old. Campers and staff alike travel to Philmont from across the country, and sometimes from other countries, all from rural as well as urban backgrounds. The majority of Philmont participants and staff tend to be middle class and white, and most of the seasonal staff members are recent high school graduates attending colleges and universities. For the hiring process, staff are placed according to their work experience, skills, and interests. Even at the living history camps, it is typical to see the staff pursuing degrees in vastly different fields of study, from biology to journalism. Indeed, very few staff members hired for the living history camps plan to pursue careers in history. Further, the hiring managers generally hire a completely new

¹⁸ Dominic Baima, “2019 was Philmont’s Largest Summer Ever!” Philmont Scout Ranch, August 21, 2019, <https://www.philmontscoutranch.org/2019-was-philmont-largest-summer-ever/#:~:text=This%20year%20has%20been%20a,well%20as%204%20foreign%20countries>.

¹⁹ For many decades, female staff members were in such a minority that they could only be hired in certain positions. In the backcountry, there were only a couple of camps that women could staff at, due to Scouting guidelines that require a minimum of two people per gender when in co-ed groups. Beyond these guidelines, there were no official rules that women could not be hired into certain positions at Philmont. For the living history camps, women were only able to work at homesteading camps until the early 2000s, when the living history mining camps hired their first female staff members. In 2018 the first women were hired to work at the living history logging camps, and in 2020 the first women were hired to work at the living history mountain man camps.

set of staff members to each backcountry camp every summer. This means that each summer, even if a veteran staff member returns, management places them at a different camp that they have not worked at before. However, management tries to place staff members at other camps that have similar programs so that their experience at previous camps can still be used. Most backcountry staff members find this system both routine and practical.

Philmont's corporate structure follows the traditional structure of other large organizations. There are several different departments, and each department has a hierarchy of management and leadership roles. The living history interpreters sit at the bottom of the hierarchy in the Backcountry Department, although they have considerable reign in their historical interpretation. Each camp's staff has autonomy (to a degree) in deciding what and how they interpret the programs assigned to them. However, backcountry upper management holds the ultimate power in overseeing these programs and providing all resources to its staff. All departments and programs at Philmont follow the same vision statement, motto, and slogan which are respectively: "to continue to positively impact the lives of young people and their Scouting leaders through inspiring and effective delivery of the finest Scouting possible through backcountry adventures and Training Center experiences," "change lives," and "delivering wilderness and learning adventures that last a lifetime."²⁰

To begin my research on Philmont's living history programs, I first took to the archives at the Seton Memorial Library and the National Scouting Museum, located at

²⁰ "About Philmont," Philmont Scout Ranch, Last visited March 26, 2022, <https://www.philmontscoutranch.org/about/>.

Philmont Scout Ranch. I accessed over one hundred Camp Director Reports—documents written at the end of each summer by the Camp Director of each backcountry camp. These annual reports list the staff’s objectives, methods, camp problems, and other quantitative and qualitative information surrounding their camps. I also conducted several interviews with former and current staff members. These staff members ranged from interpreters working at the camps to higher leadership and management of Philmont’s backcountry programs. Finally, I sent out over two dozen questionnaires to former living history staff members. I asked about former staff’s experiences with and opinions on the early living history camps and programs.²¹ My essay will only address the living history programs at Philmont from 1973 to 2019. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, unprecedented changes and shifts occurred at Philmont after 2019 that do not fit into the scope of my case study. However, effects of the pandemic on living history interpretation at Philmont and elsewhere is an important topic for future scholars to research and discuss.

My case study of Philmont Scout Ranch’s living history programs will address the interpretive changes seen in the field of public history at a local level in conjunction with a national level. This article will provide a chronological overview and analysis of the evolving living history methods employed by Philmont’s interpretive staff. I will discuss what changes occurred over the decades and the driving forces of such changes. Most of the living history staff at Philmont believe that their work existed in a vacuum, that any interpretive changes were dependent solely on the passion of staff and the resources

²¹ Because of the very brief nature of the 1980’s and 1990’s Camp Director Reports, particularly in comparison to those of the 2000s and 2010s, I targeted these questionnaires towards staff members of the 1980s and 1990s to supplement the lack of information provided by the archives.

provided by Philmont management. While the backcountry programs certainly relied on these two elements, I argue that Philmont's historical interpretation largely evolved due to outside influences. Shifting methods in the field of public history both directly and indirectly influenced the goals and tactics of Philmont's living history staff. I argue that national changes in the field of public history, spurred by socio-political changes in America, in turn shaped the field of living history even at local levels. My argument thus holds implications for other living history sites. Living history interpreters are influenced by the same outside forces as other public historians. Even if these "outsider historians" do not receive professional education or training, their historical interpretations undergo the same shifts as the those of professional public historians. Therefore, professional public historians ought to pay more attention to living history interpreters. There is much work still to do in addressing the disconnect between these fields. May this case study encourage further scholarship and discussion on a topic often forgotten.

II. THE 1970S—DEVELOPING A FOUNDATION FOR LIVING HISTORY

Historical interpretation was limited at Philmont before the popularization of living history in the 1970s. From 1938 to 1973, Philmont's backcountry consisted of non-historically themed camps. These camps taught traditional Scouting activities such as woodworking, archery, and horseback riding. In addition to these camps, the backcountry had a handful of historical camps with staff that taught specific histories of the specific areas they resided in. For example, Philmont had two different backcountry camps located nearby historic gold mines, with original cabins and artifacts from the nineteenth century. The staff at these camps taught the history of gold mining in their respective areas. They also gave tours of the retired gold mines using third person interpretation while wearing the Philmont staff uniform, much like a docent tour at a history museum. This method was the backcountry staff's traditional approach to historical interpretation, which lasted for about thirty years. However, Philmont's interpretive practices underwent major shifts in the 1970s as the field of history evolved in response to socio-political movements and the 'new social history.' The popularity of the history of everyday life gave staffers the opportunity to focus on craftwork and experiment with interpretive frameworks which, ultimately, resulted in haphazard performances.

The traditional approach to history at Philmont began to shift during the early 1970s, as staff tried out new ways of interpreting history that drew on some of the ideas behind the recently booming 'living history' sites across the country. Philmont oral histories agree that the first living history program started at Cypher's Mine backcountry camp in 1973. About halfway through the summer, the ambitious young staff members working at Cypher's Mine started experimenting with the idea of pretending to be a

group of gold miners and prospectors—aggregate representations from the local mining history they taught. Thus, they promptly bought some “old-timey” clothes from a local thrift store, adopted a heavy southern accent, and began to walk with the hunched back of a man who toiled for long hours in a gold mine.²² By the end of that summer, Scouts and staff alike raved about Cypher’s Mine and its outlandish, fun-loving miners. Philmont management recognized the potential of this new form of historical interpretation, and within a few years had converted a handful of the other backcountry camps to establish the first living history programs at Philmont.

The Cypher’s Mine staff’s sudden switch from traditional docent-like historical interpretation to living history interpretation in 1973 did not occur in a vacuum. Rather, several outside influences contributed to the unprecedented transition in Philmont’s backcountry camps. In the 1970s, popular outdoor museums such as Connor Prairie and many others expanded and altered their programs, switching their interpretative methods to living history programs that continue still today.²³ By 1970, living history had entered the professional field with the establishment of the Association for Living History Farms and Museums.²⁴ Different sites of history across the country began to adopt living history methods into their interpretation.

Americans’ interest in living history was spurred by developments in the history discipline. During the 1970s, museums and academia took major strides to refocus their historical lenses to tell the ‘new social history,’ sparked by the major social movements

²² Dave Werhane, Interview with the author.

²³ “History,” Connor Prairie, accessed February 1, 2022, <https://www.connerprairie.org/about/media-center/history/#:~:text=In%20the%20early%201800s%2C%20a,the%20rich%20forests%20of%20Indiana>.

²⁴ “Our History,” The Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums, accessed February 2, 2022, <https://alhfam.org/Our-History>.

of the decade. The civil rights movement, the Black power movement, the gay liberation, and the women's liberation movement all changed how historians saw and interpreted the past. Thus, the 'new social history' focused more on everyday life, culture, and 'regular' people, rather than the previous dominant focus on major events and political figures.

Some historians argue that the American obsession with living history in the 1970s served to indirectly combat the emerging 'new social history.' They argue that living history served as a new method that embraced an old lens of historical interpretation.²⁵ They did not believe that living history successfully told the stories of 'everyday people' because it continued to focus on major events and political figures, just as traditional history had done before the 1970s. For example, popular living history sites such as Colonial Williamsburg told very selective stories of their sites, focusing more on powerful white men and nostalgia of the colonial period and less on African Americans or women, and the struggles they faced during the time.²⁶ Some historians argue that as activists of the time fought for significant social and cultural change in the United States, many Americans simply wished for a return to 'the good old days.'

Representative of this nostalgia were the *Foxfire* volumes, which influenced many Americans—including Philmont staff—to learn traditional American crafts and skills. In 1972, popular author Eliot Wigginton published his first volume of the *Foxfire* series. This thirteen-book series "brought the philosophy and wisdom of the mountains to millions" by teaching crafts, stories, and wilderness survival skills of the Appalachian

²⁵ Malgorzata J. Rymsza-Pawlowska, "Hippies Living History: Form and Context in Tracing Public History's Past." *Public Historian* 41, no. 4 (November 2019).

²⁶ Anna Logan Lawson, "'The Other Half': Making African American History at Colonial Williamsburg," (PhD Diss., University of Virginia, May 1995).

Mountains.²⁷ Camp Director Reports and former staff heavily emphasized their use of the *Foxfire* books in preparing to work at Philmont. Staff members used these books to find recipes to cook on their wood burning stoves, understand processes to tan hides and make their own clothes, learn how to properly load and care for firearms, and apply a myriad of other information from the thirteen volumes.²⁸ That is, staff treated the *Foxfire* series as history rather than a to-do manual. These books served as the go-to research resources for living history staff members in lieu of proper training in historical as well as living history methods. Such reliance upon a popular book series set the tone of Philmont's first living history programs.²⁹

Philmont's backcountry staff struggled with incorporating 'new social history' interpretation into their novel living history programs. The late 1970s Camp Director Reports, albeit brief in nature, help piece together what these initial programs looked like. The backcountry staff lacked a real understanding of history and historical interpretation, especially in-character (first- or third- person). Archival documents and interviews with former staff indicate that for the first few years of Philmont's living history programs, staff did not receive living history or interpretive training of any kind.³⁰ This was not surprising, given that living history had only just begun to reach wide popularity as a method of interpretation in the 1970s. Therefore, staff members held complete responsibility in researching all information about their programs prior to their arrival and

²⁷ "Foxfire Series," Penguin Random House, accessed February 2, 2022, <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/series/C84/foxfire-series>.

²⁸ Dave Werhane, Interview with author.

²⁹ The *Foxfire* craze spanned beyond the field of history. Even English teachers began using the books in their classes to get students excited about reading and engaging with stories. For more on this, read "Beyond Foxfire" by David Laubach in *The English Journal* Vol. 68, No. 5.

³⁰ Finding former staff members from the 1970s proved incredibly difficult, so no questionnaires yet exist to provide personal accounts. Instead, interviews with former staff of the early 1980s corroborate with the 1970's Camp Director Report on this.

for figuring out how to present it through living history. For most staff members, this research came in the form of the *Foxfire* book series.

The lack of interpretive or historical training forced Philmont staff to draw from their own knowledge and skills rather than on best practices seen at living history sites elsewhere. Further, management required staff to supply their own period clothing, do their own research on their historical time period and theme, and teach themselves how to do the various programs such as blacksmithing or tomahawk throwing before arriving at Philmont each year.³¹ As a result, the early living history staff largely focused on entertainment in their interpretive programs. Nearly all the staff objectives listed in the Camp Director Reports for each living history camp through the 1970s contain the word “fun” or “entertaining,” although some camps emphasized this more than others. For example, one report listed its main objective was “to present Miners [sic] life as it actually was—a hard way of life. To keep crazyness [sic] to a minimum, but still have a ‘fun program.’”³² Another camp at the time stated that a “fun program is the key to a successful camp.”³³ Some of the backcountry Camp Director Reports briefly mention education or teaching in some manner, such as one camp’s goal to “acquaint campers with the lifestyle, skills, and lore of the lumberman [sic] of the area around 1920.”³⁴ However, most reports fail to include specifics on what exactly they focused on in their

³¹ Philmont management did provide a small amount of training for some of the program-specific activities, such as blacksmithing or rifle shooting. However, these were short trainings that focused on the technical aspects of the activities, not on the people or histories of the activities.

³² 1977 French Henry CD Report, 1977, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico.

³³ 1976 Black Mountain CD Report, 1976, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico.

³⁴ 1979 Crater Lake CD Report, 1979, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico.

interpretation or how they accomplished their educational objectives. In fact, all reports from this decade fail to mention that they were doing first- or third-person interpretation at all.³⁵ Philmont's early living history programs did not easily incorporate the new interpretive methods seen in the wider field of history in the 1970s. Thus, staff unknowingly fell into to trap of living history interpreters using new methods to tell histories through an old lens.

The initial switch to living history interpretation in 1973 was influenced by outside forces on a national level. The 'new social history' that resulted from the social and political movements of the 1960s and 1970s made its way even to sites of local history, albeit at a slower rate. Sites such as Philmont turned interpretive focus to everyday people and their everyday lives. The aims and practices of Philmont's living history programs continued to evolve with outside movements through the following decades. Despite the precarious foundation of the initial living history programs, the interpretive methods at Philmont reflected interpretive methods in the wider field of public history across the country.

³⁵ This is why supplementary oral history as well as written questionnaires with former staff proved to be necessary for my research, as the first two decades of Camp Director Reports were incredibly limited.

III. THE 1980S—BUILDING UPON A WEAK FOUNDATION

Philmont's living history programs continued to focus on entertainment into the following decade, based on the interpretive precedent set in the 1970s and bolstered by a cultural push towards family-centered entertainment in 1980s America. The rise of a conservative New Right deepened Philmont management's commitment to entertainment and quaint craft demonstrations—a hallmark of 1980s public history. Yet while the self-taught staff attempted to find their footing in the realm of living history, a transformation began to take place. Backcountry leadership underscored how entertainment should not be the only goal of the living history camps' programs. Some Camp Directors attempted to address issues of authenticity and creditability in the living history programs.

However, as primary sources indicate, management continued to provide minimal to no support for historical research, information, or backcountry staff training. Internal and external forces encouraged the living history staff to follow the earlier entertainment-heavy precedent of interpretation. This in turn caused the programs to border on chaotic as staff began to confront the established status quo of the backcountry programs.

While Philmont maneuvered through its own microcosm of chaos, America struggled to find order and normalcy after major cultural shifts. Unlike the liberal social movements that raged during the 1970s, the 1980s saw extreme cultural push-back with the rise of the "New Right." Events such as the Watergate Scandal, the Vietnam War, counterculture movements, and major economic crises disenchanted many Americans. Political figures such as Jerry Falwell, Betty Friedan, and Phyllis Schlafly cried out for restoration, such as Ronald Regan's presidential campaign slogan to "make America great again!" Popular films such as *Stand by Me* (1986), *Steel Magnolias* (1989), and *The*

Goonies (1985) reminded audiences of simpler times and the importance of tight-knit communities in the face of unrest. In much the same way, historian Malgorzata J. Rymza-Pawlowska argues that those who participated in living history sought a return to the times they portrayed.³⁶ She argues that living history functioned as a form of escapism away from the difficult social and political questions that Americans raised in the 1980s. This argument challenges the earlier belief that living history stemmed out of ‘the new social history.’ Or rather, it indeed stemmed from the ‘new social history,’ but with different motivations. The focus on everyday life—on history from the bottom up—that drove social history in the 1970s was certainly an impetus for living history. However, 1980s American culture shaped living history not so much with a desire to include histories of groups previously neglected, but with nostalgia and desire for the past (one often dominated by Anglo males). The two motivations behind living history are not mutually exclusive. Regardless of *why* living history gained so much interest and popularity during this time, it forced its way into the professional field of public history. For better or worse, this included Philmont Scout Ranch.

Philmont’s living history staff members had limited access to legitimate historical sources to prepare for their work at Philmont. Management did not provide support or training in historical interpretation or living history methods, so the young staff members worked to educate themselves, largely unguided. The lack of modern computer technology made research for these young staff members incredibly difficult.³⁷ Just as with the 1970s, the backcountry staff heavily relied on the *Foxfire* book series as their

³⁶ Malgorzata J. Rymza-Pawlowska, “Hippies Living History,” 37-38.

³⁷ Dave Werhane, Interview with author.

living history manual. Additionally, veteran staff members with knowledge and experience in Philmont's living history programs hosted forum discussions to share ideas and advice with newer staff members.

Despite their efforts to self-educate, backcountry staff members were not properly prepared for the work that management asked them to do. Many of the living history staff voiced their frustration at the inadequate training. Various comments and critiques about training can be found throughout various 1980s Camp Director Reports: "training as usual was poor," "Read, Read, Read!!!! Philmont can't train you so you'd better train yourself," and "[interpretive training] should not be a hurried cram session which only results in a shallow program with no depth of knowledge or understanding of the program or the time period as a whole or how it should relate to the participants in the program."³⁸ The anger and disgust felt by backcountry leadership permeates through the words of their reports. Living history staff understood that their programs relied too heavily on entertainment and lacked substantial or critical historical content; however, they did not have the means to actively address the problems.

The herculean task of preparing the staff at each living history camp fell almost entirely on the Camp Directors.³⁹ They turned to local museums, libraries, and popular culture to aid them in this undertaking. A former staff member recalled that "individual interpretive camps were allowed 3 days at the Seaton [sic] museum to accomplish research and to create scripts for interpretive history (there was no experts on hand) each

³⁸ 1981 Cypher's Mine CD Report, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico; 1985 Black Mountain CD Report, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico; 1980 Black Mountain CD Report, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico.

³⁹ Camp Directors tend to have two or more years of experience in a non-leadership position at Philmont's backcountry camps. Generally, Camp Directors are 21 to 25 years old and are often still in college.

year.”⁴⁰ Management left these young staff members to their own devices for three days in a limited Philmont library and expected them to learn every element of their specific camps’ history, activities, and interpretive time period. To supplement the library sessions for gaining knowledge, another staff member recalled that “we would even watch movies in the evening such as *Jeremiah Johnson* or *Paint Your Wagon* (really!) to kind of help get ‘in the mood...’ [But mostly it] was accumulated knowledge handed down from previous generations of staff.”⁴¹ Another 1980s staff member corroborated this story, adding that “all the interpretive camps would get together and have a forum led by the [Camp Directors] and the more experienced [backcountry staff].”⁴² On top of all of this, management expected staff to supply their own period-appropriate clothing. This often led to anachronistic outfits, often purchased at local thrift stores. Finally, backcountry management did not provide any sort of acting training to help with creating and portraying a character. No sources explain what Camp Directors did to address this, although it can be assumed that each camp dealt with this issue on an individual basis, depending on the talents and experience of their camp staff.

The lack of formal training created a two-fold issue for the living history programs of the 1980s. First and most obviously, backcountry staff members had minimal historical knowledge and no real ability to present proper historical interpretation at their camps. Second, by holding forums that asked new staff members to build on the experiences of the previous year’s staff, the danger of perpetuating misinformation and historical myth surfaced. Some Camp Directors caught on to this

⁴⁰ Cam Major, Questionnaire by author, November 2020.

⁴¹ Reggie Jayne, Questionnaire by author, November 2020.

⁴² Lee “Bear” Haddaway, Questionnaire by author, November 2020.

danger and attempted to address it in their reports with statements such as: “imaginary does not mean *bogus*,” and “sometimes contradictions arose between the programs [and history] given by different camps”.⁴³ Yet while some staff focused on addressing the question of authenticity and historical creditability, others still emphasized fun with a little bit of history thrown in. For example, one camp dedicated its main objective “to be insane and crazy but not stupid.”⁴⁴ Even for those who sought to fight this entertainment-first mentality of 1980s living history at Philmont, they did not have the outside resources to successfully do so.

The ‘new social history’ introduced a decade earlier completely changed the face of public history across America, but the New Right conservative movement dissuaded living history sites from critically engaging with these stories. Thus, sites of local living history such as Philmont were slow to implement critical social histories into their interpretation. Dave Werhane, the current Philmont Museums Director and longtime backcountry staff member, suggested in an interview that Philmont management did not provide support and aid for the living history programs in the 1980s and 1990s simply because “they were only beginning to understand historical interpretation.”⁴⁵ According to Werhane, those who held management positions at the time did not have any experience or education in public history. How could people expect Philmont’s backcountry staff members to present proper historical interpretation if the very powers overseeing them did not know what such interpretation looked like? Recent Philmont

⁴³ 1982 Cypher’s Mine CD Report, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico; 1984 Miranda CD Report, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico.

⁴⁴ 1981 Pueblano CD Report, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico.

⁴⁵ Dave Werhane, Interview with author; Werhane has over 40 years of Philmont experience.

management believes that proper training should form the baseline for good interpretation. According to current Backcountry Program Manager and Director, David O'Neill, "successful interpretive programs require consistency in knowledge as well as managerial oversight, asserted through observations and feedback throughout the summer"—none of which existed at Philmont in the 1980s.

The conservative movements of the 1980s thwarted the growth of critical public history, particularly on local levels. The desire to go "back to the good old days" encouraged quaint living history programs, largely for family-centered entertainment. The critical engagement and professional standards of historical interpretation set forth in the 'new social history' lagged in reaching "outsider historians," like those at Philmont Scout Ranch. It would take several more years before Philmont management would oversee the incorporation of such standards into their living history programs.

IV. THE 1990S—BREAKING THE STATUS QUO AND PROFESSIONALIZING INTERPRETATION

Philmont's living history camps underwent a major shift in the 1990s towards implementing professional standards into their programs, just as popular sites of public history tested their own standards. Philmont's interpretive shift can be partly attributed to Doug Palmer, the Backcountry Manager and Director hired in 1988 to oversee the backcountry programs and interpretation (which he did until 2011).⁴⁶ Palmer stressed the importance of training backcountry staff in historical interpretation and presentation. He partnered with local Santa Fe reenactors and theatre teachers that led workshops during staff training.⁴⁷ He wanted these workshops to create a baseline expectation for Philmont's living history staff and their programs. Palmer also spearheaded the movement to compile and make available to staff members "camp profiles." These two-to-three-page documents contained pertinent facts and histories—both site-specific and general—for each backcountry camp and its living history program. One camp with a mountain man fur-trapping program even had a museum daytrip incorporated into their training to help staff learn more about the history of fur-trapping and trade in a professional museum setting. Palmer's efforts helped to better incorporate professional standards and practices into Philmont's backcountry camps.

As Palmer worked to improve Philmont's living history programs with a baseline for interpretation, popular sites such as Colonial Williamsburg and the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum began to push the limits of historical interpretation. Both incredibly

⁴⁶ I was unable to collect more information on Doug Palmer from archival records or oral history interviews. I am currently unaware of Palmer's backstory, education, or previous work experience prior to Philmont.

⁴⁷ David O'Neill, Interview with author, October 14, 2020, Cimarron, New Mexico.

popular sites attempted to include challenging histories that aimed to provoke their visitors. In March of 1994, the National Air and Space Museum announced their *Enola Gay* exhibit that would showcase the B-29 that bombed Hiroshima and include both American and Japanese perspectives on the historic event.⁴⁸ Just a few months later, in October of 1994, Colonial Williamsburg put together a simulated “slave auction” to show visitors the horrors of slavery by having them watch families get torn apart and sold off right in front of them.⁴⁹ Despite their best wishes for these events to provoke deeper thought and understanding on such difficult histories, both sites had their programs met with extreme public backlash. Visitors and scholars alike cried out against the methods of interpretation employed by the two sites. For the *Enola Gay*, many argued over who ought to have control over the narrative: the institution, or exhibit stakeholders, and to what degree? Colonial Williamsburg never performed the “slave auction” again after its first weekend, and the National Air and Space Museum decided to cancel and entirely rewrite their *Enola Gay* exhibit—both as direct responses to hostile criticisms. Both sites understood the need for new historical interpretation that included diverse perspectives; however, they did not yet understand the best methods and practices to accomplish this. The “slave auction” and *Enola Gay* exhibit remain controversial amongst historians today and provide context for the shifting interpretive methods of public history during the 1990s.

With the fresh controversies at Colonial Williamsburg and the Smithsonian looming, Philmont remained slow to change its interpretive methods. After two decades

⁴⁸ Richard H Kohn, “History and the Culture Wars: The Case of the Smithsonian Institution's Enola Gay Exhibition,” *The Journal of American History* Vol. 82, No. 3 (December 1995) 1038.

⁴⁹ Cary Carson, “Colonial Williamsburg and the Practice of Interpretive Planning in American History Museums,” *The Public Historian* Vol. 20, No. 3 (Summer 1998) 11.

of unregulated living history programs, Palmer's efforts to educate and train the staff did not immediately expunge the backcountry's institutional memory. Many staff continued to present non-critical historical programs using earlier methods employed at Philmont's living history camps. A 1991 Camp Director Report offers a lengthy critique of Philmont's interpretive programs and exposes the chaotic culture of Philmont's living history. The Camp Director first listed what they believed the interpretive goals of all the living history programs should be, then pointed out specific examples of poor presentation and historic interpretation seen across the backcountry:

We have more "interpretive" [character] nicknames in the backcountry than we probably have campers. Loggers have worn sunglasses and neon boots. Mountain men have worn nice big fur hats. These pathetic examples are really not nearly as important as the total lack of historical knowledge that these "Mickey Mouse" Camp Directors portray. On the other hand, Camp Directors that are so involved in the history itself, that they pay little attention to the campers. The sad part about this is that they do not have a lot of knowledge about the program and this is often left untold.⁵⁰

This scathing review of Philmont's living history sheds light on some of the painfully inaccurate interpretative methods employed by staff. This report also hints at the belief that period-appropriate attire contributes to historical accuracy—a belief shared in several interviews with former staff. According to this report, staff wore whatever clothing they

⁵⁰ 1991 Miranda CD Report, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico.

wanted (even if it was clearly anachronistic), they created outlandish “Mickey Mouse” characters with little grounding in historical fact, and many staff members seemed to care more about having fun together than educating the campers that visited. This 1991 report fell into a chorus of other voices at the time, demanding action from future Camp Directors. They urged future staff to break the cycle of misinformation and entertainment-heavy programs by instead emphasizing consistency, authenticity, and accurate representations at their respective camps. Such criticisms voiced by staff give a newfound understanding for the training tactics that Palmer implemented. With camp profiles and workshops led by professionals, Palmer’s efforts to professionalize the backcountry helped to catalyze interpretive shifts in the living history programs.

During the 1990s, the Camp Directors’ mission statements and camp objectives moved away from the vague “have fun and teach Scouts our program” to specific and realizable goals about presenting accurate histories. For example, a homesteading camp wanted participants to “understand the importance of the family as a unit of work, independence and defense on the frontier.”⁵¹ Such language shows that the staff connected their homesteading program to a wider understanding of the historical context and significance of their program. Albeit rudimentary, staff began to grasp that interpretation should not exist in a vacuum but hold relevance to visitors and to other historical events. Camp mission statements that incorporated more specific and relevant language echoed the those of professional sites of public history, thus showing that

⁵¹ 1994 Crooked Creek CD Report, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico.

Philmont's interpretive aims and methods could also resemble those of more popular sites on a national level.

After two decades of unregulated programming, more of Philmont's backcountry leadership felt responsible for changing and improving their living history interpretation. This suggests that backcountry leadership wanted their staff to reflect methods and best practices of other historical sites in America. Inspired by the efforts of Doug Palmer to incorporate such professional standards, Camp Directors looked to lead their staffs towards more critical interpretation. For example, a homesteading camp veered away from the traditional Anglo settler narratives in their interpretation of a prominent local Hispanic family. The 1994 Camp Director Report for this camp stated that "We never pretended to be Spanish settlers but we showed the campers things that Spanish settlers may have done. At [our camp], this is essential to maintaining credibility. Trying to act as those people did will only lead to an Anglo stereotype of the Spanish culture."⁵² Many components contributed to the backcountry's shifting mentality towards interpretation. First, this camp's staff acknowledged the element of race—and that white staff members could not accurately or respectfully pretend to be Hispanic.⁵³ Before this 1994 report, none of the staff seemed to consider how or why other races ought to be interpreted. Indeed, living history sites across the country struggled with racial inclusivity in their

⁵² 1994 Abreu CD Report, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico.

⁵³ Since 1973, some of the living history programs at Philmont have included histories of Indigenous and Hispanic Americans. While I have not confirmed this with any former staff, Philmont rumors suggest that in the 1980s and 1990s white staff members did indeed portray Native peoples in their living history programs. However, the Hispanic homesteading camp indeed has Anglo staff that portray the Hispanic Abreu family still today (2022). Whether the living history staff chooses to be first person or third person with their characters depends on the staff and the Camp Director each year. This specific camp has been a hot topic for debate in recent years.

programs and to what degree white interpreters can discuss the stories of non-white people.⁵⁴ Second, the camp's staff acknowledge their role in shaping narratives and preconceptions of the historical figures they interpret when they discuss "Anglo stereotypes." While the report does not specify or discuss these stereotypes, it shows awareness of negative racial depictions. Finally, the Camp Director invokes the term "credibility" for the first time in any of the backcountry's Camp Director Reports. This signals a major shift in how staff thought of historical interpretation and their work in living history. Under the guidance of management and leadership, staff began to emulate critical interpretations like professional historians.

While written records showed an upwards trend towards informed and more professional interpretation, interviews with 1990s staff members disagree, claiming that such changes were an exception to the rule. Instead, interviews reveal a surprising contrast to the staff-written reports. Andy Gerhart, a former Philmont interpreter and long-time Civil War reenactor offered his thoughts on Philmont's backcountry interpretation during his time on staff:

In the 1990s (through today), we would jump in and out of an historical role, but we were neither trained nor proficient on the history period we were portraying...Historical information was taken from former staff at face value, hence there would be some corruption of actual historical fact from year to year, like the telephone game... In summary, we did attempt

⁵⁴ For a Black perspective on this topic, watch Azie Mira Dungey's comedy series "Ask a Slave," that addresses the challenges a Black woman faces while playing the role of enslaved woman at a living history site. She also has an interview conducted by public historian and living history expert Amy M Tyson called "'Ask a Slave' and Interpreting Race on Public History's Front Line," in *The Public Historian* 36 no. 1.

to educate (and some of us did a very good job of that), and I think the campers got a sense of the trials, tribulations, and nuances of the time periods, but not all of the info they learned was valid. If the campers hiked away from our camps entertained, we felt our job was well done.⁵⁵

Gerhart's commentary on historical information and experiences passed down from one year to the next harkens back to the same concept of "training" in the 1980s, when staff members attended forums to share stories and advice with one another. This suggests that Doug Palmer's efforts at training and educating staff remained thwarted by long-standing traditions and flawed institutional memory. Reggie Jayne, another 1990s staff member and current history professor at Boise State University, admitted that his higher education in history post-Philmont allows him to now have a deeper understanding and critical lens of the work he did as a staff member. He described his own experiences of working at Philmont:

We learned just enough history to get by and added words like Foofaraw and Huzzah for effect. We'd mix pop-culture with our historical interpretation and think nothing of it because it would connect with the scouts and advisors...Mind you, I don't think that is necessarily bad. We were tasked with providing great program for a bunch of teenage boys who were worn down from a hard day of hiking. If we connected, it was worth it. Again, had I not went to school to do graduate work years later, I

⁵⁵ Andy Gerhart, Questionnaire by author.

think I would probably be saying we were historically accurate and really focused on providing great historical program.⁵⁶

Both interviewees had more professional experience and education in the field of history than they had in the 1990s. Thus, their reflections suggest a more critical understanding of their previous work at Philmont. This context may offer one explanation for the disparity in Camp Director Reports and interviews with former staff. While the Camp Directors writing their reports at the time may have seen inaccuracies or inadequate interpretations at their camps, they did not have the knowledge, understanding, or vocabulary to address it or enact any changes. Most compellingly, these interviews suggest that professional standards of interpretation may have influenced Philmont management and backcountry leadership; however, the non-leadership living history staff remained unaware of such influences and did not knowingly incorporate such standards into their interpretation. This raises questions such as: How did outside influences and professional standards filter down Philmont's managerial hierarchy? How did staffers understand the changes to public history on a national level? Is it necessary for non-leadership to fully comprehend such changes to provide proper interpretation?

The dilemma that backcountry camps faced in attempting to maintain or evolve their interpretation parallels other museums of the time. Certain camps worked to include diverse perspectives and offer narratives more reflective of the

⁵⁶ Reggie Jayne, Questionnaire by author.

‘new social history,’ such as Colonial Williamsburg and the National Air and Space Museum attempted to do in the 1990s. Although their initial efforts at breaking the status quo received criticism and backlash, sites such as Colonial Williamsburg and the National Air and Space Museum pioneered the thought-provoking interpretation that museum professionals aim for today. Interpreters made attempts to implement these types of changes at some level, even at less prominent sites run by those who loved history but were not necessarily trained in it.

V. THE 2000S—SETTING A STANDARD

By the 2000s, the field of living history across the country grew even more popular, and organizations such as the National Park Service expanded their standards of interpretation. These national standards then trickled down to popular public history sites such as Connor Prairie. Even at Philmont Scout Ranch, Doug Palmer doubled his efforts to employ more professional standards and baseline expectations for the backcountry programs. Largely thanks to Palmer, a noticeable shift resonated throughout the living history staff's interpretation. Camp Directors began to note their camps' previous failures of historical interpretation and offer suggestions for betterment. With improved methods of interpretation and living history training, staff members grew more critical of their work and more aware of their responsibility as historical interpreters.

During the 2000s, backcountry management began to incorporate more formal training for its living history staff. Doug Palmer built on his earlier relationships with local theatre teachers and historical interpreters to dedicate a full day of workshops for interpretive training—a day that he called “Heritage Day.”⁵⁷ The current Backcountry Director, David O'Neill, explained that Palmer teamed up with a local historian and living history interpreter named Deborah Blanche, who conducted demonstrations for the staff to show them how a professional interpreter engages with audiences. Additionally, Palmer brought in local acting teachers to instruct the living history staff how to create, portray, and stay in character.⁵⁸ Finally, Philmont officially teamed up with the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) and began implementing some of their training

⁵⁷ 2005 Pueblano CD Report, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico.

⁵⁸ David O'Neill, Interview with author.

methods.⁵⁹ Thus, new professional standards on the national level influenced standards held at local levels, such as at Philmont. Interestingly, when asked about these changes two decades later, staff members from the early 2000s could only recall working with the reenactors and teachers but did not recall working with the NAI or learning any of their guidelines.⁶⁰ Heritage Day created a new baseline standard that established expectations for Philmont's living history. These workshops taught staff how to engage their audiences with more informative methods while also keeping the illusion of their time period and characters. With the Heritage Day training, staff could focus their interpretation by adopting skills and tactics used by professionals elsewhere. Over time, the inclusion of Heritage Day into the practically non-existent living history training of the 1980s and 90s marked Philmont management's biggest move towards improving its interpretive backcountry programs.

The terminology of "heritage" and "history" have a complicated relationship, and living history often serves as the middle ground between the two. Many historians of the 1990s and early 2000s criticized heritage for its mass appeal and for its paradoxical nature. In 1998, historian David Lowenthal argued that Westerners were becoming increasingly obsessed with the concept of heritage as a connection to the past due to a growing sense of lost identity and a growing desire to "revert to ancestral legacies."⁶¹ He claims that at the turn of the century, heritage sites were "a prime lure of tourism,"

⁵⁹ Dave Werhane, Questionnaire with the author, March 9, 2022.

⁶⁰ Several of these former staff members were not in leadership or management positions, so it is possible that Philmont's professional relationship with the NAI was only known by backcountry management. Indeed, of the 2000s staff members I interviewed, they accredited the shift in interpretive ideologies to the passion of the staff themselves rather to any training or resources provided by management.

⁶¹ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Library, 1998) xiii.

showing that whether scholars like it or not, heritage had taken hold of the public.⁶²

Lowenthal acknowledges the power of heritage to bring communities together and promote discussion, but that it can also breed elitism and xenophobia.⁶³ Put bluntly,

Lowenthal believes that history is a record of the past while heritage is a celebration of the past. For good and for bad, heritage influences audiences just as history does.

Therefore, Lowenthal argues, scholars and historians ought to pay more attention to

heritage, because both history and heritage stake claim to the past. Further, neither

heritage nor history are unbiased and infallible— interpretation shapes the message that

audiences receive.⁶⁴ Yet living history serves as a moving facet on the heritage/ history

spectrum. It functions as neither wholly one nor the other as it fluctuates between the

two. Just as Lowenthal suggests, interpretation ultimately determines the message that

audiences leave with. The danger then lies in the awareness of living history interpreters

to shape an appropriate message. However, the evolving interpretive methods at Philmont

show that national standards did indeed influence standards of interpretation on a more

local level.

In the wake of a booming heritage industry, other living history sites across

America adopted new pedagogies and programs to better reach their interpretive goals.

For example, the National Park Service (NPS) had established the National Standards of

Interpretation in 1996, which they later revised and expanded in 2000 and 2008.⁶⁵

According to their website, the revamped NPS training modules helped to provide a

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, xiv.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 119.

⁶⁵ Becky Lacome, "Interpretive Development Program," National Park Service, Last Updated November 30, 2009, <https://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/theprogram.htm>.

foundation “for *meanings-based* resource interpretation,” that is, interpretation that has a clear purpose or message to its audiences. The modules also emphasized “the importance of multiple perspectives in the CIP [Comprehensive Interpretive Planning] process in order to identify and articulate a broad range of resource meanings, interpretive themes and delivery venues to reach multiple audiences.”⁶⁶ By stressing meaning-based interpretation with multiple perspectives, the NPS shaped a baseline of interpretation for history sites across the country to emulate. One notable example is Connor Prairie’s “Follow the North Star” program that opened in 1999. This groundbreaking program changed the face of living history by employing second-person interpretation methods. Participants in this program played the role of enslaved African Americans, attempting to escape the South while different interpretive staff either guided or hunted them through the 90-minute experience.⁶⁷ This award-winning program continued for over twenty years, seeing tens of thousands of participants. Indeed, “Follow the North Star” encouraged other living history sites to make their programs participant-centered, introspective, and unafraid to confront difficult histories. However, even under the guidance of outside professionals, sites such as Philmont continued to struggle in meeting the standards and methods set by the NPS and Connor Prairie.

Mixed reactions of praise and criticism for Palmer’s fledgling Heritage Day training suggest that the new training methods lacked real substance and did not properly prepare the living history staff. For example, one Camp Director Report stated that “Since we are an interpretive camp[,] Heritage Day is a must, although unfortunately I do

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Carl A. Weinberg, “The Discomfort Zone: Reenacting Slavery at Connor Prairie,” *OAH Magazine of History* Vol. 23, No. 2 (April 2009).

not feel like much of it is as applicable to our camp as it is to other [living history] camps. Obviously, learning about staying in character and how to deliver porch talks [the welcoming speech all visitors receive upon arrival] without sounding like you are giving a canned ‘porch talk’ are both important.”⁶⁸ One staff member from the 2000s offered a harsher criticism of Heritage Day training when he bluntly remarked that “they brought in an acting coach. It was fun, but living history isn’t acting.”⁶⁹ Such statements show that staff realized that performance, such as vocal training staying in character, composed only *part* of the necessary training for successful living history. They felt that the Heritage Day training did not meet their needs for historical interpretation, especially because most staff had no experience in proper interpretation. Indeed, such negative reviews exposed the difficulties that Philmont management faced in employing professional standards and practices into a previously unregulated program, three-decades old.

In addition to introducing living history training for staff, backcountry management and leadership also worked on expanding the “camp profiles” that Doug Palmer first began in the late 1990s. Palmer and his colleagues put the camp profiles together using oral histories, primary records from different interpretive camps’ eras, and secondary sources that discuss the different New Mexico histories portrayed at Philmont. These profiles provided historical information about each camp and its history (both local and general) so that staff members did not have to do outside research on their own. The dawning of new computer technology and internet services likely aided in management’s

⁶⁸ 2007 Fish Camp CD Report, Digital Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Philmont Scout Ranch, Cimarron, New Mexico.

⁶⁹ Bill Forster, Questionnaire by author, December 2020.

research process for these profiles, although such technology was not yet widely available to Americans during the early 2000s. The expansion of camp profiles helped staff to learn about their camps and programs from more scholarly sources than the usual *Foxfire* series. However, some of the profiles held vastly more information than others, depending on the documentation available on the programs and the histories presented at each camp. The lack of information could determine the staff's success in following professional interpretive methods, as one staff member from 2000 to 2004 explained:

I think we got a good amount of history and practicality into the mine tours, with a good balance of entertainment (jokes and then scaring them while they found their way out in the dark). So I think these two [mining] camps handled it really well in the early 2000s. My summer at Rich Cabins [a homesteading camp] was more of a free for all, just focused on finding something to entertain the participants with. We did tell the history of the Rich family and Ted Turner in the cabin tour, but I'm pretty sure the rest of our 'program' was just more about giving the campers something to do [like chores around the homestead] ... We also had a campfire program occasionally, but it was again, an anything goes kind of affair.⁷⁰

Some camp profiles provided adequate information and background that helped the staff with their interpretation. In contrast, other camp profiles lacked substance and forced staff members to revert back to older, quaint demonstrations and entertainment-heavy

⁷⁰ Jennifer Van de Griek, Questionnaire by author, November 2020.

programming. Thus, professional standards and training could only go so far without the help of adequate historical knowledge.

Philmont management's efforts of professionalizing their interpretive programs did not go unmarked by backcountry leadership and non-leadership staffers. More Camp Director Reports began to acknowledge and address their camps' shortcomings with first-person interpretation. Yet even with the Heritage Day workshops on performance and presentation, staff struggled with their interpretive roles and meeting management's new expectations. For example, a 2005 Camp Director Report confessed that "When it came to first person interpretation we did poorly. We did our best and largely succeeded in always appearing in interpretive clothing [and] using interpretive equipment. However, when it came to promoting our [first person characters] we were less than enthusiastic, usually not pursuing the character as far or as long as we could."⁷¹ While this Camp Director admits that their staff tried to meet management's interpretive expectations, they acknowledge that they could have done better. Such recognition of inconsistent or lacking interpretation stands apart from the majority of Camp Director Reports from previous decades. For the first time, multiple Camp Directors recognized the necessity for professional advances in their interpretive programs and called future staff members to action to oversee such developments. This change in perspective likely came from the new guidelines and standards taught by the National Association for Interpretation that Philmont began adopting into its training. Notably, however, many interviews with staff of the early 2000s accredit this change to the passion and drive of the staff themselves

⁷¹ 2005 Crater Lake CD Report, Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Seton Memorial Library at the National Scouting Museum, Cimarron, New Mexico.

and do not recall any outside influences. New national professional standards in public history likely influenced the interpretive methods employed at Philmont, even if staff did not see it that way.

VI. THE 2010S—NEWFOUND EXPECTATIONS

Philmont Scout Ranch's living history programs continued to follow the path of professional standards in the 2010s with new changes to staff training, the introduction of new backcountry management, and expanding on the baseline expectations established in the early 2000s. For a decade and a half, Doug Palmer helped set a precedent for the living history staff's training and preparedness. When Palmer's tenure ended in 2011, he handed his position over to David O'Neill, the current Backcountry Manager and Director. O'Neill's first summer season at Philmont began in 2012—the year that several sources agree marked a milestone for the living history programs' interpretation. According to staff members who worked at Philmont both before and after 2012, O'Neill and his colleagues made great improvements to the staff training, the period clothing provided, and to the resources made available for staff. Simultaneously with these new changes, however, backcountry staff members saw major increases in their level of responsibilities and required duties, pulling staff's attention from improving their programs.

Outside of Philmont, parks and living history sites saw further improvement and critical engagement with their methods of interpretation. Part of this shift in the field of interpretation can be accredited to the publication of two foundational books: *The Gifts of Interpretation: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture* by Larry Beck and Ted T Cable in 2011 and *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose* by Sam H Ham in 2013.⁷² Both of these works expand on the principals first laid out in 1957

⁷² Larry Beck and Ted T Cable, *The Gifts of Interpretation*; Sam H Ham, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum) 2013.

by Freeman Tilden's *Interpreting Our Heritage*, adding their own philosophies and suggestions on proper interpretation and audience engagement. Further, these works addressed standards and guidelines for interpretation in the modern age of internet and the technology industry. Organizations such as the National Park Service (NPS) and the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) later adopted these works into their training and methodology, forming the foundation for the modern practice of heritage interpretation.⁷³

Under the management of David O'Neill, Philmont took major strides in implementing national professional standards of interpretation into the living history programs. O'Neill took the concept of Palmer's "Heritage Day" and expanded on it, dedicating two full days of staff training to living history interpretation with "Interpretive Skills Day" and "Living History Skills Day."⁷⁴ During these two days, Philmont hosted workshops and presentations with living history professionals, theatre teachers, and former Philmont staff-members-turned-History-professors.⁷⁵ Some of these instructors taught lessons on proper interpretation using methods from the NPS, including the new methods discussed above. These workshops typically lasted two to three hours in a classroom setting, with lessons taught by a NPS representative. The representative

⁷³ Clark Hancock, certified interpretation instructor with the NAI, email with the author, March 31, 2022; "About the Program," National Park Service Interpretive Development Program, Last visited March 31, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/theprogram.htm>; "Interpretation," Eppley, Last visited March 31, 2022, <http://interpretation.eppley.org/>; As can be seen on their website, this company runs interpretive courses that the NPS requires, and uses the standards established by the NAI. This website offers interpretive training courses and certifications to individuals and companies.

⁷⁴ 2012 Fish Camp CD Report, Digital Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Philmont Scout Ranch, Cimarron, New Mexico; It should be noted that while this training day was called "Living History Day," Philmont staff do not refer to their work as "living history." Instead, Philmont staff call the living history camps "interpretive camps," or "interp camps" for short. They call their programs "interp programs," and the act of staying in-character and period correct as "keeping interp." These colloquialisms certainly deserve further analysis.

⁷⁵ Dr. Rich Loosbrock, Questionnaire with the author, November 2020.

covered some of Freeman Tilden's key principals of proper interpretation and how Philmont staff might employ these at their camps. Further, the representative taught examples of poor interpretation, with warnings to avoid "interpretainment" (interpretation with too much focus on entertainment), "interproganda" (interpretation with too much focus on a specific agenda), and "interpredata" (interpretation with too much focus on data and facts).⁷⁶ In addition to the classroom lessons, several living history volunteers gave presentations of their different crafts and skills, so staff had examples of what professional interpretation looked like. Meanwhile, other instructors during the "Interpretive Skills Day" and "Living History Skills Day" taught improvisational skills and the ability to create and stay in character. Unlike the NPS representative or living history volunteers, these instructors focused more on the theatrical aspect of living history. In addition to these two days, camp staff continued to take the field trips to outside museums relating to their programs that rudimentarily started in the early 2000s. These sites included traditional museums, outdoor museums, and living history museums, such as the New Mexico Mining Museum, Bent's Fort, Fort Union, Martinez Hacienda, and El Rancho de las Golondrinas.⁷⁷

Several long-term staff members attested to the improvements in training and agree that it set Philmont on a more professional path of interpretation than ever before. One staff member who worked at Philmont from 2010 to 2021 stated that "Over the summers I witnessed the living history skills day evolve from a fairly simple fieldtrip to

⁷⁶ This knowledge comes from personal experience attending these workshops. My first year to work at Philmont was 2016, and by that point the same NPS representative had taught the same workshop at Philmont for two years. I later took a Certified Interpreter Course with the NAI in 2022 that taught many of the same lessons and used the same exact terminology for the warnings of what to avoid in interpretation.

⁷⁷ Dave Werhane, Questionnaire with the author.

Rayado [a Philmont camp] to a full day of guest speakers and informative demonstrations.”⁷⁸ Similarly, another staff member with several years of experience admitted that “When I started [in 2012], seasoned staff saw living history camps as ‘fun in the backcountry and making it up as we go along.’ Now...hiring staff with an interest in the program and including outside living history semi-professionals have greatly upped the professional aspect.”⁷⁹ Perhaps in the exact vision that David O’Neill had, the improvements to the living history and interpretive training given to staff members began to alter the entire mindset of the backcountry staff. Dr. Rich Loosbrock, a history professor at Adams State University in New Mexico, has served as a historical liaison with Philmont starting in 2019. Loosbrock shared that “David O’Neil’s [sic] work has been critical in grounding the camps in a specific time and context and providing scholarly backing to support the staffs. It has been a long evolution from the 1970s.”⁸⁰ Most of staff members who worked at Philmont both before and after 2012 attest that the training vastly improved, and in turn improved the living history programs of the backcountry.

As staff members received improved interpretive training, Philmont management also increased their expectations regarding staff customer service and visitor satisfaction. In the 2010s, management pushed all its staff to focus on further engaging with Scouts—to make their Philmont experiences good enough that they would want to return.⁸¹ This in turn led to a more Scout-centric interpretation in the backcountry programs—turning

⁷⁸ Will McKinney, Questionnaire with the author, November 2020.

⁷⁹ Tucker Baker, Questionnaire with the author, November 2020.

⁸⁰ Rich Loosbrock, Questionnaire with the author, December 2020.

⁸¹ This was no doubt a marketing tactic, as Philmont is one of the biggest breadwinners for the Scouts of America organization. Further, with the recent legal cases against the Scouts of America, the organization had to claim bankruptcy in the fall of 2019. Since then, the cost of visiting Philmont has greatly increased.

camp mission statements away from history and methodology and instead towards Scouting values. Philmont management expected its backcountry staff to simultaneously deliver informative and engaging living history programs while also shaping young Scouts into upstanding adults, all in hopes of higher participant retention. Camp Director Reports of the 2010s show how staff attempted to meet these hefty expectations. One 2012 Camp Director Report lists its camp mission as “to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law while providing a high quality interruptive [sic] program.”⁸² Similarly, another camp’s 2015 mission statement reads:

We have a unique role of interpreting the transformation of this area into the Scout Ranch that we know today. In doing this, we have the opportunity to portray and emulate the generosity and kindness of Waite Phillips [the founder and land donor of Philmont], as well as the ability to discuss the legacy of the land, and how the best way to enjoy nature is to preserve it and pass it on. We aim to inspire guests by showing how Waite Phillips’ gift was a manifestation of many of Scouting’s key values, and how it continues to represent and embody these values.⁸³

Both mission statements emphasize the staff’s understood responsibility to connect each of their camp’s programs to the Scouts visiting their camps. However, the second mission statement suggests that staff made Philmont Scout Ranch itself integral to the history of

⁸² 2012 French Henry CD Report, Digital Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Philmont Scout Ranch, Cimarron, New Mexico.

⁸³ 2015 Hunting Lodge CD Report, Digital Backcountry Archives, CD Reports, Philmont Scout Ranch, Cimarron, New Mexico.

the land, therefore shaping their historical narrative. Interviews and questionnaires with former staff members reflect nearly identical sentiments towards the interpretive focus at their camps during these years. Thus, for the first time since the living history programs began in 1973, the backcountry staff had a relatively uniform purpose and goal in their interpretation.

Philmont management's expectations of increased customer service simultaneously increased the focus on musical entertainment in the backcountry. To achieve this, several backcountry camps provide evening campfire shows with songs, skits, and storytelling to their visitors for about forty-five minutes to an hour. These campfire shows were meant to serve as an extension of a camp's program, with the performance as a vehicle for interpreting the history of the land and people at their respective camp. Although many of the living history camps of the 1980s and 90s provided such shows, the 2010s saw much heavier importance placed on these performances. Now, management expects many of the living history camps to provide quality entertainment at the end of the day. Despite management's goal for the campfire shows to serve as an extension of the camp's interpretive program, many present and former staff members argue that the emphasis on these performances hurts the overall interpretation of a camp. One staff member from the early 2000s to 2019 admitted that the camps that offer campfire shows "have had a tendency to excessively favor their evening program, at times neglecting their daytime program delivery."⁸⁴ Other 2010s staff members hold harsher critiques of the value placed on the campfire performances.

⁸⁴ Caleb Jennings, Questionnaire with the author, December 2020. Jennings was a staff member from 2006-2008 and then 2010-2019.

They argue that the new musical emphasis now effects the staff hiring process by encouraging management to assign staff members according to musical talent rather than historical knowledge or interpretive skill.⁸⁵

In addition to Philmont Scout Ranch, other living history sites imposed high expectations of customer service to encourage higher visitor return rates. For example, Historic Fort Snelling in Minnesota saw challenges in simultaneously meeting the demands of visitors and the interpreters themselves. Amy M Tyson, a public historian and former interpreter at Fort Snelling, described the tension she and other interpreters faced in her 2013 book *The Wages of History: Emotional Labor on Living History's Front Lines*.⁸⁶ Tyson's work examines the role of living history interpreters as both a service worker and cultural producer. She argues that the multitude of expectations placed on staff often forced them to make sacrifices to pay, emotional health, and their working lives as they continued to work at Fort Snelling. In turn, staff felt devalued in comparison to the amount of work they put into the living history site. Tyson argues that despite such challenges, staff chose to stay at Fort Snelling because the emotional fulfillment they had by connecting with visitors through living history and because of the workplace culture of self-identity (as opposed to collective identities).⁸⁷ The challenges that interpreters faced at Fort Snelling make surprising parallels to the challenges of Philmont interpreters. While both sites sought to improve visitor experiences, they simultaneously strained their own staff.

⁸⁵ Dave Werhane, Interview with author; Eric Smallwood, Interview with author, October 21, 2020, Cimarron, New Mexico.

⁸⁶ Amy M Tyson, *The Wages of History*

⁸⁷ Amy M Tyson, *The Wages of History*, 23-24.

By the 2010s, Philmont's interpretive standards resembled other professional sites of public history more than ever before. In comparison to the 1970s, staff members now have the full support of Philmont management, access to a full warehouse closet of period clothing, and two full days of living history and interpretive training with outside professionals. However, backcountry staff also have greater responsibilities to the Scouts visiting their camps. Whether composing an evening music performance or molding a camp mission statement to encompass Scouting ideals, Philmont management's newfound expectations impacted the interpretive programs. This leaves questions for the future of Philmont's backcountry: Will the new focus on Scout-centric programming be at the cost of professional guidelines for interpretation? Does Philmont risk reverting to their 1980s mindset of family entertainment and nostalgia? Will Philmont management continue to partner with national organizations for training, or is there a possibility they may cut ties if they believe that their goals no longer align with those of other professional organizations? Questions like this loom in the wake of a global pandemic that has devastated sites of public history with plummeting visitor numbers and revenue.

VII. CONCLUSION

The timeline of the living history programs at Philmont Scout Ranch offers a compelling case study on how national standards for public history and interpretation have made their way into programs at a local level. The complexity and longevity of Philmont's interpretive programs certainly demand further investigation and recording. However, the story of Philmont's backcountry camps reveals a unique evolution of living history interpretation on a scale unlike any other site in the world. While the methods of interpretation constantly varied from camp to camp and year to year, my research reflects an upward trend towards professionalization in Philmont's timeline. That is, Philmont began to incorporate similar aims, methods, and standards of interpretation employed by other sites and organizations at a national level. The living history presented by the ambitious Cypher's Mine staff members of 1973 widely differs from the living history presented by Philmont's present-day interpretive camps. Today, staff members have greater access to research, to period-appropriate clothing, and have more robust living history training that follows standards set by leading authorities on interpretation.

Public historians ought to pay more attention to sites of living history, even at local levels. Those on the front lines of public history, the living history interpreters, connect the public to the past on a personal and engaging level. At sites such as Philmont Scout Ranch, these interpreters tend to not have professional education or training like historians who work at universities or large museums have; yet they successfully engage the public with passion and excitement for history. Despite the prominence of America's heritage industry and wide popularity of living history sites across the country, these

“outsider historians” rarely get the level of scholarly attention they deserve.⁸⁸ However, socio-political forces and shifts in the field of history influence these “outsider historians,” even on a local level, just like their institutional counterparts. I believe that living history interpreters are much less “outsider” than other public historians may believe. Thus, I encourage public historians— “outsider” or not— to further research and discuss living history sites on local levels.

With this case study I urge present and future Philmont staff to view their work as public historians more critically. My case study shows that Philmont’s living history interpretation has resulted from outside socio-political forces, yet not in a steady line of progression. While resources and support have vastly increased for the backcountry, the living history programs still have much room for improvement. Years of unregulated and unsupported interpretive programs encouraged Philmont’s living history staff to often favor entertainment in their interpretation. Hundreds of thousands of Philmont visitors have learned history not from characters, but from caricatures. Eric Smallwood, a current staff member who does living history outside of Philmont, confessed that in professional circles of historic interpretation across the states, Philmont has earned the derogatory title of “Westworld.”⁸⁹ Further, the newer trends towards emphasizing customer service in the backcountry, such as with the evening campfire performances, may have negative impacts on the future of Philmont’s historical interpretation. If Philmont Scout Ranch wishes for its programs to teach and engage visitors using professional guidelines and methodology on a national level, they need to hold themselves to a professional standard.

⁸⁸ Benjamin Filene, “Passionate Histories.”

⁸⁹ Eric Smallwood, Interview with author, October 21, 2020, Cimarron, New Mexico.

Just as other sites of public history, staff at Philmont's living history camps hold some authority in shaping public memory with their narratives. Each year, approximately 22,000 Scouts from across the country visit these camps. Philmont's interpretive programs provide the first interactions that many of these young visitors have with histories of the American West. In the wake of the American public education system gaining more politicization—such as numerous state bans on the teaching of critical race theory in K-12 schools—today's youth are less likely to engage with and understand the complexities of United States history.⁹⁰ It then becomes the responsibility of Philmont's living history staff to shape narratives that engage visitors with the complex histories that the backcountry has to offer.

Even at the local level, living history programs have the same responsibilities to their visitors as more popular sites. They must engage with audiences, inviting them to delve deeper into the complexities of the past. They hold authority in shaping public memory. Living history programs with staff members that favor entertainment in their interpretation risk simplifying the very histories they teach, dehumanizing the people they portray, and largely denying visitors the opportunity to form connections from the past to the present. Philmont's case study asserts that living history programs must be properly supported and regulated, or else they risk skewing public memory and inhibiting visitor engagement. Simultaneously, however, Philmont's living history camps reveal that professional standards of historical interpretation on a national level can and do influence the methodology of public history sites on a local level. Further, socio-political changes

⁹⁰ Rashawn Ray and Alexandra Gibbons, "Why Are States Banning Critical Race Theory?" Brookings, November 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2021/07/02/why-are-states-banning-critical-race-theory/>.

over time effect the theory and practice of living history just as it effects any other field within public history.

Academics have often written off living history as too kitschy, celebratory, and nostalgic; yet they should consider it a valid style of interpretation with compelling methodology. The overwhelming numbers of visitors that living history sites across the country receive each year signal that these programs will not disappear anytime soon. Whether for entertainment, escapism, or education, the public flocks to sites of living history. However, these programs engage audiences with history in ways that traditional museums cannot. Living history interpreters bring in a certain energy, passion, and wittiness that historians in other public history fields should seek to emulate in their own work. Whether they claim the title or not, living history interpreters are public historians. Their interpretive methods follow standards that evolve with societal change, just like any other public historian's. They help shape public memory, just as other public historians do. Ultimately, they connect the public to the past, just as all public historians do. Therefore, more work needs to be done to address the disconnect that living history has from the wider field of public history. If academics and other professional historians continue to write off living history, they deny themselves the opportunity to learn from a fascinating practice. Further, they exacerbate the ostracization of living history interpreters from the field of public history. Especially in a world now scarred from a global pandemic, public historians need to work together and learn from one another. Living history, from a national to a local level, has much to teach us... if only we would pay attention.

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